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The PEACOCK'S SHADOW

By E. Hoffmann Price

"I drew and leveled the Luger—then remembered I looked into a mirror."

"*MON VIEUX,* what do you say to a bit of housebreaking?"

This, from Pierre d'Artois, a gentleman of France and a master of the sword, seemed unusual, to say the least.

"Well, why not?" I agreed, not to be outdone by the d'Artois nonchalance. "But whose house do we invade? What the devil, do you fear I will become homesick if from time to time there is not something to remind me of my own native land of liberty?"

"*Mais non!* No, we are not going as prohibition agents. Not at all! And it is no ordinary house into which we are to break. We invade the château of Monsieur the Marquis de la Tour de Maracq," announced Pierre as he stepped on the accelerator of his favorite car, the Issotta roadster.

"But what of Monsieur the Marquis?" I suggested with what seemed to be a touch of reason.

"He is very busy at Biarritz at a fencing tournament."

Well, this solved one riddle: I now knew why d'Artois, that fierce old *ferrailleur,* had overlooked a chance to demonstrate his exquisite mastery of the sword.

"But, *mon Pierre,* what of the housebreaking? What loot are we after?" I ventured as we cleared Pont de Mousserole and left behind us the gray battlements of Bayonne.

"The truth of it is, I am playing what you call the hunch," he evaded, then continued: "But he is the good hunch. There has been an elopement, and it is for me to locate the lady."

Worse and worse yet! A quiet month in Bayonne . . . .

"Who is the girl?"

D'Artois laughed.

"A princess, and the daughter of a king."

"Not bad for a marquis. And young and beautiful?" I retorted to

the mockery I saw in his keen old eyes.

"Beautiful, yes; if you like such beauty. But young, no. In fact, older than I am."

"The devil!"

"The truth! Thirty-seven hundred years old at least."

This was too much!

"*Mais non.* I do not jest," continued Pierre. "She was stolen from the Guimet museum of Lyons and carried all the way to the château of the marquis."

"Well, and that is a case for the police, is it not?"

"No. For one is not really certain; it is but strongly suspected that he accomplished the almost impossible feat of looting the museum and carrying the mummy to his château. Monsieur the Prefect of Police, not being any too sure of himself, has taken me into his confidence and asked me to investigate unofficially. A false move would ruin him, since Monsieur the Marquis is a man of influence."

"But why should anyone steal a mummy, especially de la Tour de Maracq, who is rich as an Indian prince, and of a house as old as Charlemagne?"

"A scholar, a soldier, a man of letters," enumerated d'Artois, continuing my thought, "and a fantastic madman, if this report is correct. He is too talented for sanity."

"Even as yourself," I hinted.

"*Touché!*" acknowledged d'Artois. "But I do not elope with ladies 3700 years old."

He fingered a pack of *Bastos,* but thinking better of so foul a deed, decided to light the Coronado I had given him.

"All very quaint. But let's get to facts," I urged. "What have you to work on in this love affair?"

"I have the good hunch. And it is more of a love affair than you realize."

Which was logical enough. Those whom gold could not tempt, might indeed steal objects of art, jewels over which to gloat in secret, a relic, an antique rug; but a shriveled mummy! Well, tastes vary.

And the case should be simple of solution, at least as regarded the marquis; for the missing lady could not be concealed with any degree of facility. A simple matter of walking or climbing into the château, and leaving again with our princess; or else reporting that she was not to be found, and that Monsieur the Marquis was not her abductor. A jewel could be hidden; but a mummy . . . .

THE château was perched upon a crest some hundred meters off the road. We parked the Issotta and proceeded on foot.

Instead of knocking at the door, as seemed to be his intent, despite his quip about housebreaking, d'Artois selected a key from his ring, tried it; selected another, picked at the lock, but to no avail. The third, however, was applied with more success; the heavy door yielded to his touch, admitting us into a vestibule, thence to a salon.

"Welcome to Tour de Maracq," murmured d'Artois with a courtly bow. "Quick about it, and we'll be out of here long before he has fought his last bout."

"But the servants?" I suggested.

"They are few in number. It seems the marquis has an aversion to women, so that there are no female domestics to contend with. Thus it is that one of the *ménage* has gone to Bayonne to negotiate with a stranger who sought to buy some rare vintages which are to be pilfered from the master's cellars. Another is keeping a rendezvous with a demoiselle who hailed him a week ago and made an engagement for today. Each has some illicit engagement whereof he will not babble. Now it would have

been inconvenient to arrange on short order for lovers for any female servants . . . praise be to the eccentricity of Monsieur the Marquis!"

I noted the rich tapestries; the massive teakwood furniture; the floor of rare hardwoods partly masked by Chinese and Indian rugs. And on the walls were arms of infinite variety; wavy-bladed kresses, kampilans, simitars; halberds, assegai, lances; maces and battle-axes in endless number, all grouped in clusters. Some of these arms were burnished; but many bore dark, ominous stains.

And thus we roamed through the house, from one apartment to another, I wondering at the beauty, the grotesquerie, the oddness of the furnishings and adornments, d'Artois regarding all with an appraising glance that revealed nothing of whatever interest he might have felt.

Strange gods in bronze and onyx and basalt glared at us, brandished their distorted arms in futile rage, mouthed threats with their twisted lips; resented our presence in every way possible to inanimate things; inanimate, yes, but enlivened with the spiritual essence absorbed from their centuries of devotees. But no mummies. Nevertheless, d'Artois studied his surroundings. But nothing seemed to arouse his interest, until . . .

"Ah . . . look!"

He indicated a tiny *darabukeh,* a small kettledrum whose body was of grotesque carven wood, its head of a strange hide; strange to me, at least.

"Curious, yes. But what has this to do with mummies?"

"Nothing at all. But I fancied that drumhead . . ."

A smile concluded his remark. Now what the devil significance had that little tom-tom?

"But no mummies, Pierre."

"True. But one can picture a man's mind from the house he keeps. Fancy then the odd brain that twists in the skull of de la Tour de Maracq!"

And thus, room by room, we searched the château proper, servants' quarters, basements, passages and all. Toward the end of our tour we stumbled upon a stairway which led to an apartment which we had overlooked.

It was a large room of contradictory appearance: a study, if one judged from its desk, table, bookcases; a bedroom, surely, if gaged by the lordly canopied bed of antique workmanship; or a museum, if one drew conclusions from the ornaments.

As we had done in the salon, we found again a collection of arms, armor, polycephalous gods with contorted limbs and features. And this time, mummies, two of them: one in its sycamore case, the other, not only encased, but enshrined in its massive granite sarcophagus.

Naturally I was exultant.

"Useless!" exclaimed Pierre. "See how they fit their cases; and see also that none of the cases would fit the princess we seek."

With a tape he laid off the dimensions of the mummy we sought, showing clearly that those present were of greater stature.

"Not so good, Pierre, not so good. Apparently we're stuck."

"Not entirely," muttered Pierre absent-mindedly.

I saw him examining an *épée,* a slim, three-edged duelling sword. The pommel, which was adorned with a tiny silver peacock, seemed to fascinate d'Artois. Which was natural enough, Pierre being a connoisseur of the sword, and its undisputed master. Still, business was business . . .

A dried, mummified human head, wrinkled and shrunken, a Patagonian relic, hung by its hair from a cluster of arrows. And this, attracting my eye to the library table over which that gruesome trophy hung, drew me to the table itself. I picked up from

the inestimable Kurdish rug which covered its top a thick book, leather-bound, and emblazoned with a peacock.

"Hell's fire! It's bound in human skin!"

"So it is," agreed Pierre. "I wondered how long it would take you to recognize human hide when it was tanned. You passed up that little drum without noticing it."

And then Pierre thumbed the pages, began to read to himself. Glancing over his shoulder, I saw that he well spared himself the trouble of reading aloud. The book was either in Arabic or Persian, neither of which I could understand.

As Pierre read, and fumed, and muttered, apparently quite interested, I devoted myself to the one bright spot in that necrophagous apartment: a painting in oils, a portrait of a young woman, lovely beyond all description, with smoldering, Babylonic eyes, full, delicately sensuous lips; fine features whose every line and curve bespoke calm, aristocratic insolence. And this smiled from a cluster of swords, and was enshrined in an atmosphere of death and doom, and gruesome relics! Whether or not the kidnaper of a mummy, this marquis was surely a freak.

Pierre's smile, as he laid down the book he had been reading, resembled that of a cat who has just had a pleasant *tête-à-tête* with the canary. Whether the worthy marquis had expressed his unusual humor by having a book of Arabic jests bound in human hide, I couldn't say; but Pierre seemed on the inside of something which had been evading him.

The portrait caught his eye.

"Very lovely. Yes, I met her, twenty years ago, shortly before her untimely death. His last mistress . ."

Death . . . death . . . even that loveliness enshrined by morbid trophies was itself a memento of death. I shuddered, chilled, despite the sun's slanting rays which warmed and illumined that necrophiliac room.

"And he sleeps here. Or is this but an antique, a decoration?"

I glanced again at the lordly bed, half expecting to find festoons of skulls about the canopy, fringes of scalp locks, strands of teeth. Then I noted an unnatural curvature of the drawn curtains, something which forced them forward, and out of their natural drape.

"*Que diable!* Another mummy! And no case to match."

D'Artois took from his vest pocket his tape-line, took measurements, compared them with his notebook; studied the wrappings, the markings.

"The very lady!"

I advanced to pick up the aged beauty. Simplicity, this quest. And this, after all Pierre's halo of mystery!

"*Jamais! Pas du tout!* We must locate the case; all or nothing. If we alarm him, who knows what may happen to the case? *Allons!*"

But before leaving, he paused to regard once more the portrait of the girl with the Babylonic eyes.

"That was a lovely little *épée*, that one with the peacock on its pommel. It seems strangely familiar . . . well, and since the marquis has probably fought his last bout and is on his way back, we leave opportunely," remarked d'Artois, as the Issotta's long nose headed toward Bayonne.

At Place de Théâtre we parked, found a table on the paving, well within the shade of the awning. D'Artois called for a weird favorite of his, whose two ingredients he himself mixed, and then diluted with charged water: a milky, curiously flavored drink, Anis del Oso and Cordiale Gentiane, a suave, insipid madhouse in a slim, tall glass. The springs of the Isle of Patmos must have flowed with Anis del Oso!

As we sipped and smoked, I noted

the great limousine of Monsieur the Marquis de la Tour de Maracq draw up to the curbing, returning from Biarritz. Lean, aquiline-featured, elegant and courtly in bearing, and haughty as Lucifer was the marquis. Touching the brim of his high hat with the head of his stick, he acknowledged the salute of the footman, then handed from the limousine a woman whose features, to say the very least, startled me.

"What in——!"

"No, *mon cher,*" murmured d'Artois, "she is no ghost, though she may be the reincarnation of the lady whose portrait we saw at Château Maracq. There is no telling what deviltry the marquis has worked in his day, but this is a flesh-and-blood woman. And now do you see a light?"

"A light? What in the world has she to do with this mummy?"

D'Artois laughed maliciously.

"I'll swear you have mummies on the brain! But just wait. Well, that is Mademoiselle Lili Allzaneau of 34 rue Lachepaillet. Like her scriptural counterpart, she lives on the city wall in an apartment overlooking the park."

Which last was of course superfluous: for the mention of her address was quite sufficient. Yet La Belle Allzaneau bore the stamp of the thoroughbred; the patrician insolence, the smoldering Babylonic eyes, long, narrow, veiled; the slim, gracious hands of a princess of the blood. And her dress, and her figure, and her bearing were all in accord. Behold the *grand dame* of the château, and her double, La Belle Allzaneau of rue Lachepaillet!

A FEW days elapsed, during which Pierre left me to my own devices. And then, emerging from his preoccupation, he sought relaxation in a stroll which took us along the Adour, around, and back to the ramparts of Lachepaillet.

To our right was the Gate of Spain, its drawbridge and guardhouse; far beneath us, at the foot of the city walls, on whose parapet we sat, was the bottom of the dry moat; while to our left front, across the moat and a hundred meters beyond its outer bank, was the Spring of St. Leon and the cluster of ancient trees that half concealed it. Though their crests almost met, their trunks were widely separated, so that the spring and its low, hemispherical cupola were in a small clearing.

The sun was setting. Long shadows marched slowly across the gently rolling ground beneath us, and to our front. Pierre d'Artois, as he took from his case and lit a villainous *Bastos,* stared at the Spring of St. Leon. And then he resumed the thread of his rambling discourse, continuing a tale he had so often before begun and abruptly abandoned.

"With that lunge I could have impaled the devil himself, for I had him swinging like a windmill, skilful swordsman though he was. Yes, and had it really been Monsieur the Devil himself, and not Santiago with whom I crossed swords, I still hold that someone must have struck me down from the rear to save his lord and master!"

He spoke of his secret duel by moonlight with Santiago the Spaniard, two years ago, in the small clearing by this very Spring of St. Leon, and of the outcome of the affair: how, as after hard, fierce fighting he had slipped through the Spaniard's guard to impale him with a thrust to the chest, there had been an awful flare of elemental flame, followed by blackness and oblivion; how Jannicot, his servant, had come in search of him, carried him back to the car; and how, on the return trip, they had found Don Santiago dead beneath his own car, wrecked on the way *from* Spain,

hurrying, apparently, to keep his rendezvous with d'Artois.

"Since Santiago never reached Bayonne to meet me, then who? A double? For that stout wrist was not that of an apparition, nor do illusions or phantoms leave footprints, nor can they beat one's blade so that one's arm tingles up to the shoulder. Impossible!"

"But then what did hit you?"

"Who knows? Perhaps a confederate, despite our having agreed to meet without seconds. But by the time I recovered full possession of my wits, several days later, any bruise the blow might have left had subsided. Yet something must have struck me. . ."

In the lengthening shadows, the Spring of St. Leon appeared less and less as a place for midnight trysts, either for love or war. And though listening to Pierre's dissertation, my thoughts were of Bayonne, this "pet" city of mine which is still girdled by walls and moats and earthworks; whose ground is steeped with blood spilled in centuries of warfare, and undermined with casements, and passages, and dungeons. Some of the passages had been built by Vauban when he fortified the town; but there were many others, of much greater antiquity; vaults wherein Roman legionaries had worshiped Mithra, Saracen emirs practised necromancy, and medieval alchemists sought the immutable Azoth, and dabbled in thaumaturgy.

"A curious thing I noted," continued d'Artois, "was that a small silver peacock adorned the pommel of his *épée*. . . strange how one notes such details before a duel. . ."

Silver peacock. . . why, we had seen a similar sword at Château de la Tour de Maracq the other day! . . I wondered. . .

And out of that network of passages, what might not have emerged from a mining casemate to strike Pierre from the rear and save the day for Santiago, or Santiago's double, or the devil, or what it was that d'Artois had met?

Something had loosened the ordinarily well-shackled d'Artois tongue. I marveled, and encouraged its wagging. And then he stopped short, pointing toward the Spring of St. Leon.

"By the — — —!" he exclaimed, quaintly distorting a selection from the American doughboy's lexicon, which he strove most valiantly to master. "What is *she* doing there?"

A girl stood at the spring; a slim girl whose white arms and shoulders and iridescent gown gleamed boldly against the shadows of the grove and the dark cupola of the spring.

"La Belle Allzaneau," explained Pierre; for I lacked that old man's keen vision.

As he spoke, she rounded the cupola of St. Leon, its low gray mass hiding her from sight.

"But how can you recognize anyone at that distance and in this light, Pierre?"

"Her general outline, the gown she wears. . . which by the way is a trifle inappropriate for the locality. . . I have often seen her at the Casino at Biarritz."

THAT evening, as Jannicot brought our coffee, d'Artois, after theorizing for a while about the duel at St. Leon, abruptly switched to the mummy, poor neglected lady whom he seemed to have entirely forgotten.

"Your imagination, *mon cher*, is entirely dead," he declared. "And in this quest of the mummy case (for we have the lady herself located) one needs much imagination. *Alors*, to you shall fall the duty of private soldier; that of sentry-go, by night. Jannicot shall walk post during the day."

"What?"

"Yes. Sentry-go. You watch by night."

"Why pick on me?"

"You are too conspicuous in this small town. Jannicot, watching a cow staked on the city wall, would never be noted, for he will look like any other yokel similarly occupied. Whereas you. . ."

I bowed elaborately in appreciation of the compliment.

"Whereas you, under cover of darkness—but that is obvious."

"But how will watching 34 rue Lachepaillet assist you?"

"It will prevent your disturbing my meditations."

"Still, what has that girl to do with mummies?"

"Imbecile! You have no imagination. So take your post at sunset, watch until morning, and report to me all the exits, entries, and doings of La Belle Allzaneau, and her visitors as well. Though few but Monsieur the Marquis call at her apartment."

And thus I spent a week, walking post by night. Not truly walking, but rather lounging on the parapet of the ancient battlements, always keeping an eye on the door of Lili Allzaneau, who lived on the city wall, who had ensnared a marquis; "a peer of France," as they used to put it.

And what was Pierre, *beau sabreur* and master of devices, doing as I frittered away my time, noting the princely cars which stopped at the door of Lili of the City Wall; listening to the sound of merriment subdued to a patrician pitch: an aristocratic reserve in keeping with the *lorette* who designed to accord only to the lords of the world the pleasure of her presence?

Each morning I rendered my report, usually with mocking formality, imitating the supposed manner of a private detective. I especially enjoyed the report of the fourth vigil: "Monsieur Pierre d'Artois, noted boulevardier and swordsman, was seen entering the apartment of Mademoiselle Allzaneau at about 11:30 p. m., apparently having returned with mademoiselle from the theater. When I quit my post at sunrise, he had not yet left."

"Idiot!" snapped Pierre, relishing the jest. "You slept on post."

"The devil I did; I watched most vigilantly."

"Well, since you must know it all, the apartment of Mademoiselle Allzaneau has an exit on 43 rue des Faures, the alley which parallels rue Lachepaillet. Now, are you ashamed of your base insinuations?"

I was properly squelched. Later, I checked up on rue des Faures and verified his claim. But what in all creation had Pierre been doing in the company of La Belle Allzaneau? A man of his age! Though I could well conceive that any lady of the world could take pride in being seen with Pierre d'Artois, that fine, courtly old master of the sword.

What a mess! Not a trace of connection between any of the diverse elements that danced before my eyes: a marquis, a mummy he had stolen, her still missing case; a duel, fought two years ago at St. Leon, and a *lorette* with Babylonic eyes. . . yes, and the lady of the portrait at the château, the double, the deceased original whose reincarnation La Belle Allzaneau seemed to be. Too much for me!

But one does not question d'Artois to any purpose.

A week, as I said, had passed: uneventful espionage. And then, just as I was to leave Pierre's house to resume my vigil, he detained me.

"A moment, *mon vieux*. I have again the hunch. It will happen tonight."

"What, for the Lord's sake, will happen? The mummy seek her case, or you elope with Lili? Or challenge your rival the marquis?"

"Anything is more than likely to happen tonight. I hear that Monsieur the Marquis has gone to Spain. And Mademoiselle Allzaneau will receive no visitors this evening, not even me. And so on. . . I have the hunch, as you so elegantly put it, the hell will be popping tonight."

"Well, where do I come in?"

"You? You shall follow her should she leave her apartment; follow her, and see it to a finish, whatever it be. It may be to a strange place, *mon vieux;* therefore take these with you."

He passed me a Luger automatic, a blackjack, and what appeared to be a left-handed, fingerless, mailed glove; strangely like a Roman cestus, at least as to its obvious purpose.

"Looks like trouble, Pierre," I remarked, as I strapped the Luger and its holster under my left arm. "But why this glove? . . . and . . . what the devil! A peacock decorating it!"

"Yes. It may serve you well. If you are accosted, exhibit the peacock, and you will be passed on without question."

"Lay off, Pierre, lay off! Have you a dime novel complex?"

"*Mais non.* Do not laugh. You may have no occasion to try it. But remember the peacock. A full moon will make your task easier, or more difficult. . . that depends. . . As for me. . . we may meet unexpectedly. But if not, see it to a finish, and do not fail me."

With this command firmly impressed upon me, I took my post, wondering at the assortment of junk which he had forced upon me. A Luger. . . well, that was sound judgment; a pistol is an excellent playmate. And a blackjack could conceivably come in handy. But that fingerless glove with its peacock!

NEARLY midnight. Not a car in front of her apartment all evening. La Belle Allzaneau evidently was carrying on revery and not riot during the absence of her lover in Spain.

A copper kettle of a moon was rising.

"Do not fail me. Follow her and use your judgment."

Well, and into what sort of mess would Pierre be venturing in the meanwhile? Rich entertainment somewhere for someone!

Lord, what a sleepy night! Silence along rue Lachepaillet, and more silence in the park beneath me, beyond the dry moat that girdled the walls. The night before Christmas was fairly spiked to the mast for pure stillness.

Follow Lili. . . where? Why the pistol, the blackjack, the ornamental brass knuckles? . . brass, the devil! I'd have sworn they were gold. . . or perhaps it was the moonlight..

A light in Lili's window, just for a moment. Then darkness again. And then the door on the *rez-de-chaussée* opened. Lili herself, in a gown of star-dusted, metallic luster stepped into the street, crossed, paused within a meter of my lurking place.

In the entire world had I never seen a woman half as lovely, as perfectly formed, as faultlessly arrayed as she was, from her silver slippers to her dusky hair. . . great Lord! a peacock tiara, all aflame with small rubies, and emeralds, and sapphires and diamonds glowed in the darkness of her coiffure! It began to seem as though I had but to step forth, show her my brass knuckles and their silver peacock, and claim her as a partner in whatever devil's dance was in store for us.

"Follow her, and use your judgment."

No, better not accost her; else he'd have said, "Accompany her."

All this in an instant; then she turned to a low, narrow entrance directly beneath my position on the

parapet, and vanished into its opening.

Now what on earth was that faultlessly gowned girl doing in an ancient powder magazine or storeroom which used to serve the garrison in days past? I'd prowled around in many of them; all were crowded with rubbish, and filth, and the dust of centuries.

Now when should I begin to trail her? If immediately, I should betray my presence; if I paused, I'd lose the trail. And then I became aware of the aura of perfume she had left behind her, a rich, heavy, arabesque fragrance. The very scent a sample of which Pierre had let me smell the other evening! Now, by the rood, I could trail that persistent, curious perfume anywhere. . . . So, after a pause of a few more moments, I leaped from the parapet and plunged into the magazine.

"Plunged" is the right word, though I didn't begin plunging until my third step into the darkness, when I stepped into vacancy. I came to a stop at a landing, ten steps down. With belated good judgment, I sized things up with my electric torch. More steps, steep, narrow, rubbish-laden, leading to abysmal blackness far below. And in darkness I edged my way down. The haunting, persistent fragrance of La Belle Allzaneau led me on.

I paused at the foot of the last flight. My feet were on sandy bottom. I listened, but heard nothing save the breathing of that fierce silence. And from the subterranean mustiness came the perfume of Lili, reaching from the blackness to enfold me. She had been there, and had not branched off into any lateral passages on her way down.

Luger in one hand, torch in the other, I stabbed the gloom. Vacancy. I was alone in that ancient vault, alone with the perfume of a girl who wore a jeweled peacock in her hair.

There were tiny footprints on the sand. And then I noted a low archway, an exit, which, being on the shadowed side of a bastion, had not had its presence betrayed by the entrance of outer moonlight. Lili had left the vault, whose bottom was on a level with the bottom of the dry moat; had left the enclosure of Bayonne, and was without the walls, somewhere.

Then I picked up the trail, tiny footprints in the sand. She had kept close to the wall, heading along toward Porte d'Espagne. But I knew she would not pass that point: for no woman would ruin her footgear in the slime and mud of the moat bottom past the Gate of Spain, the result of seepage from the locks of the Adour.

Beneath the drawbridge of Porte d'Espagne, I picked a lingering trace of perfume; and likewise her footprints, which for several paces I had lost. She had edged away from the wall, crossed the moat, ascended the steep bank.

Her destination? Logically, any place; she had choice of the whole countryside. Nor could I trail her any farther. Tracking in sand is the limit of my skill!

I took stock of my surroundings. If she continued in a straight line. . .

Hell's hinges! She was bound for the Spring of St. Leon, that unsavory spot where d'Artois, in his moment of victory over Santiago, had been struck from the rear.

Conceivably she might be keeping a rendezvous with the marquis, or more likely, some other lover. And we had seen her there a week ago, at sunset.

Things seemed to be pulling together, but leaving me still confused. The girl had some connection with this spot where Santiago, armed with a sword whose pommel was adorned with a peacock, had met d'Artois. The marquis had a similar sword; and the marquis was the girl's lover. And the girl was the living image of

the former mistress of the marquis. She wore a peacock in her coiffure, and I wore one on my left hand. Well, what of it? Something, yes; but what?

A sequin glistened on the ground. In the stillness of the clearing, the heavy air still bore a trace of her perfume. But she was nowhere in sight.

I sized up the ground near the spring. There, in that small, flat space, Pierre and Santiago had crossed swords. There was the rock on which he had laid his hat and coat. Here he had taken his position, sword in hand, on guard. . .

I whirled in my tracks. Pure nervousness; a reflex occasioned by the memory of that something which had struck d'Artois from the rear. There, in the shadow of a small knoll, was the entrance to a casemate, seemingly at least. Another sequin gleamed on the ground. On her way, she had severed a thread of her gown, and was now shedding sequins every few paces. With her short start, she could scarcely have left my range of vision, unless she were deliberately hiding. Then. . . logically, she had entered the casemate; had at least paused at its entrance, as the sequin dropped from her gown indicated.

Without any excessive eagerness or exultation, I entered the casemate. Darkness, absolute. But a trace of her perfume! I smelled not only perfume, but trouble; here, for a fact, I was really getting into something.

A few steps, feeling my way in the dark. I dared not risk the torch. Ahead of me, apparently around a curve, was a faint glow, as of a dim light still farther beyond, a shadowy reflex of a half-concealed illuminant; so dim that I had not perceived it for a moment. Well. . .

"HALT!" snapped a voice.

The flare of an electric torch smote me full in the face, blinding me. But before I could draw the Luger. . .

"You are late," continued the voice, "and I doubt that the master will receive you in that garb. . ."

"Never mind my clothes," I temporized, catching my wits and also a glimpse of my accoster, now that the ray had left my face. "Has the lady of the peacock——?"

I touched my forehead with my left hand, a more instinctive than deliberate gesture to indicate Lili's coiffure. As I lowered my hand, the watcher bowed low, kissing the peacock's figure.

That was an excellent little blackjack I wielded with my right, smacking neatly across the inclined head of the warder.

"Well, and if the master is particular about costumes, perhaps this will answer."

After stripping the hood and cape from the sentry, I bound and gagged him, arranged him snugly against and parallel to the wall, and continued my way down the passage; down, literally, as it inclined at a rather quick slope, curving ever to the right, so that it led back toward the citadel of Bayonne, and far beneath its foundations. At regular intervals, candles cast a dim light.

I had noted the swarthy, foreign features of the warder I had blackjacked, and wondered still more. Almost anything was likely to happen . . . and where was Pierre?

Then came steps, winding, circular steps, leading to the very heart of the earth. Chilly dampness had displaced the outer warmth. To what strange festival was that girl bound? And what was that peacock which had such talismanic effect on the warder? Who the master? And why the costume?

At the foot of the winding stairs I found a twisting passage, this time level. Turns. . . more turns . . . a murmur of voices, chanting sonorously. . . and then. . .

A heavy iron grillwork, a gate,

barred my progress. I flattened myself close against the door jamb, peering through the bars at a unique sight. Before me, at the end of the passage, was a great vaulted chamber, illumined with a deep red glow. As much of the walls as I could see was covered with black arras, figured grotesquely in silver embroidery, monstrous designs of intertwining forms and unheard-of creatures alternating with medallions inscribed in characters resembling Arabic. At the far end of the vault was an altar, behind which stood the enshrined image of a great peacock, his painted fan fully spread, and enameled in naturalistic colors. A bronze railing rose waist-high before the altar; and from a cleft in the platform between the railing and altar, two great black hands, palms uplifted, reached forth.

Kneeling on the floor in crescent formation were a dozen robed and hooded figures, worshipers at the peacock's shrine. The chanting had ceased; and from the group rose one who advanced to the altar steps, facing the image, extended his arms, and began the recital of a ritual. At times he paused for the response of the communicants; resumed his chant, ceasing again to make gestures and genuflections. But not a word of it could I understand; neither of the priest, nor of the worshipers.

Well, and where was La Belle Allzaneau, she who wore on her forehead the unusual symbol which seemed to be the key to this secret place into which I had wandered? And Pierre? Certainly he had not sent me on into this place and stayed off the scene himself; or had he miscalculated, sending me to real action instead of reserving it for himself? . . . And thus I wondered, wondered at the scene, at the rites, at the unholy tapestry of the walls, and the cornices which depicted in sculptured panorama the unsavory themes of Asian mysteries. . . the predecessors of the peacock.

Pierre? . . . No, Pierre could not have miscalculated so far as to send me into the midst of things and follow a false lead himself . . . great Lord, could it be Pierre who conducted the ritual? Absurd; but the audacity of the man knew no limits!

On and on rolled the rich, resonant voice of the priest. Acolytes marched about the crescent of kneeling communicants, swinging censers and chanting; retired, grouped themselves about the altar. And then. . .

The priest turned to face the congregation. Not Pierre, but Etienne, Marquis de la Tour de Maracq! He who had stolen the mummy of a princess; he who lived surrounded by death's symbols, a servant of polycephalous idols, he who studied an obscure book bound in human hide, found time also to act as high priest of the silver peacock.

A sweeping gesture; another sonorous phrase; and the assemblage rose, bowed, backed out of the vault, toward the iron grating through which I peered.

I shrank back against the wall, becoming a shadow among the shadows, and waited for the grill to swing open and let the worshipers enter the passage so that, emerging from my angle, I could mingle with them, one of them, disguised in my hood and mask, and guarded by the peacock on my wrist. And once they had passed on, I could return.

And then I remembered the warder I had bound and gagged. Would they notice him lying in the shadows? Should I hasten on ahead of them, conceal the sentry outside the passage, and thus avoid the alarm caused by his discovery? Damn that sentry! Why had I left him where he dropped?

The door clicked. Too late to run on ahead to clear the way. The cloaked worshipers crowded even into my corner in that narrow passage, not

even noticing me. One, however, seemed to mistake me for a comrade who had knelt beside him, and had left at his elbow.

"The master seemed hasty tonight, don't you think, Raoul?"

I shrugged my shoulders, mumbled a phrase in Tagalog. The ruse served well. Evidently men of all languages met there.

"Oh, pardon, Monsieur. . ."

And he went on through the passage in search of his comrade.

I mingled with the dozen who were leaving, contriving to fall back unobtrusively, thus avoiding the appearance of lingering in a place from which all were departing. And as the tail of the file of hooded men rounded the first turn, I dropped back and resumed my post at one side of the grill, deep in the shadows, seeing, but unseen.

The marquis descended from the altar steps, halted in the center of the vault; stroked his black mustache; frowned. . . Three swift steps to his left brought him to the heavy black arras, which he parted.

"They have gone, *chérie.*"

And from behind the embroidered hangings came La Belle Allzaneau, white arms and shoulders and iridiscent gown agleam under that deep, lurid light.

"Etienne, I'm somewhat disappointed. . . I had expected——"

"To see something grotesque and awful, and outlandish? *Ma chère,* those whom you saw were neophytes, and the rites of the innermost shrine are not for their eyes," explained the marquis as he again parted the arras and drew from behind it a low table laden with refreshments.

He then drew up a chaise longue among whose cushions the girl enthroned herself. The marquis took his place opposite her, and facing me, so that while I could look him full in the eye, I could see but the profile of La Belle Allzaneau, Lili of Lachepaillet, the *lorette* who had the manner of a queen.

"No, *petite,*" continued the marquis, "those were neophytes. But to you I shall reveal——"

"Yet am I not even more of a neophyte?" interrupted the girl as she selected a wafer from the tray before her.

"Nevertheless, I shall reveal to you, as I promised, the innermost secrets; you shall enter the adytum, the awful holy of holies."

"But, Etienne, you must explain. Who is this peacock, and what is his significance?"

Who, indeed, was the peacock? I forgot, for the moment, that the bound and gagged sentry might be discovered by the departing communicants, thus betraying the fact that someone had intruded. Still, it had taken me ten minutes to enter; and they, going upgrade, up flights of steps, would require more time. And should they return, they would search each passageway, taking their time, in all thoroughness, probably twenty minutes or half an hour.

Well then, and what was that glittering bird whose image had caused the warder to bow and kiss my left hand?

"The peacock," explained the marquis, answering the girl, as well as myself, "is the symbol of him we serve: Malik Taûs, which in the Persian signifies 'Lord Peacock'."

"Which explains exactly nothing, Etienne!"

"Malik Taûs," he repeated, as one who humors a captivating but unruly child, "is none other than he whom they call Ahriman. . . Lucifer, the Morning Star. . . Satan, the outlaw, he whom we, the rebels, the battered but unvanquished ones serve. Now do you understand?"

Eavesdropping on devil-worship! What next?

And La Belle Allzaneau smiled her

slow, enigmatic smile, unterrified at that which made me shudder.

Thus, as they ate and drank, the marquis explained the monstrous scenes depicted on the cornices, Oriental perversions antedating Malik Taûs, the girl interrupting from time to time. I watched, and wondered.

Very curious it was that their voices seemed to come from my right clearly, but as from a greater distance than the speakers seemed to be. It was as if I were watching some fantasmagoria. Her voice I heard as her lips parted; but it seemed to come not from her lips, but from my right.

And then it struck me as odd that they both were left-handed. Both ate left-handed, picked up their goblets with their left hands. The marquis, striking a match, struck it with his left. Was this left-handedness another manifestation of the rites of Malik Taûs, or was it but coincidence that both the girl and her host were left-handed?

"This is an ancient shrine," continued the marquis, his voice clear, but coming not from in front of me, down a long, narrow passage, but seemingly from my right. "This is an ancient shrine in which Mithra was worshiped by Roman legionaries; and renegade Moslems and those who followed the Moorish forces into Spain bowed here before Tanit, and Istar, Mylitta, and Anaïtis, all of whom are one, one goddess who came out of Egypt. . . Isis, the Great Goddess. . ."

I listened, fascinated by the rich voice of that strange, dark man; nor wondered that the girl was ensnared by his pagan chant, his intoned syllables which sang of monstrous rites and unheard-of lore. I forgot, remembered, and straightway dismissed the thought of the possible return of the departed neophytes. My Luger would serve me well, if necessary; and hand to hand, the brass knuckles.

As the marquis smoked and drank, and expounded, I saw that his gaze went past the girl, seeming to seek me in my alcove of blackness. But no, surely he could not see me, where I crouched in darkness. He frowned passingly, shook his head, made a fleeting gesture of annoyance, as of one who is irritated by the buzzing of a mosquito. Then, continuing his speech, he reached again behind the arras.

I heard a click, and at the same time a faint, droning, humming sound. For a moment the lights dimmed. And then, suddenly, I awoke to the significance of that which had occurred. In the darkness I saw very distinctly a bluish violet glow, an aureole which surrounded each of the bars of the gates before me. That click had been the sound of a latch slipping into place; and that glow was the leakage into the air of a high tension electrical current!

Hell's bells! Had he seen me? Did he know of my presence? Or. . . perhaps. . . most likely it was that he suspected the presence of some loitering neophyte, some eavesdroper who had paused, and who would, as he leaned against the grillage, be seared and scorched lifeless by the flaming death that lurked in that ironwork. My advance was barred beyond all hope.

Well, I could watch; and in case of a pinch, a shot from my Luger would reach down the passage. For I felt sure that the marquis designed some outlandish deed; not only the words of Pierre, but the atmosphere of the place, the very expression of the man himself so worked on my nerves that I sensed the presence of something hideous and unheard of. That lurid light, that glittering peacock, those black hands upraised toward the altar, and the hypnotic words and chanting tones of the marquis. . . I shuddered. It is not pleasant to consider shooting an unarmed man from ambush, but. . . as these French put it, *que voulez-vous?*

"Without evil, there could be no good," continued the sonorous rhythm of the marquis. "They are extremes of the same essence, even as heat and cold are of the same nature. And to serve the Lord of Evil (if evil indeed there is) is to pay a just tribute to him without whom there could be none of the so-called good, if good indeed there is. Thus in time to come, when Malik Taûs spreads his painted fan over all the earth, we who now serve him shall be princes and lords, and shall inherit the world. Look!" he commanded, his voice rising imperiously as he pointed to the shrine; "look and see his thousand eyes that watch over us!"

The girl turned, following with her eyes his compelling gesture. And in that instant the marquis, never pausing in his speech, dropped into her wine a tiny pellet.

The man was mad with a fearful, unspeakable madness. And here I was, barred from preventing what I now sensed to be impending, a sequel to the preliminary rites I had witnessed, a manifestation of demonaltry in which none but the high priest would officiate.

"Those black hands? They are the hands of Abbadon, the Dark Angel who serves Malik Taûs; and on them we lay that which we dedicate to the Lord Peacock," explained the marquis.

I loosened the Luger in its holster. At times one must shoot from ambush . . . but not yet.

"And so you are the only adept, Etienne?" queried the girl, resuming her wine.

"There was another, but he is dead. Through my fault. Don Santiago de las Torres Negras."

Lord, what a revelation! Here, in this awful place, I was about to learn another side of that uncanny duel fought by Pierre d'Artois at midnight, at the Spring of St. Leon.

"He challenged one Pierre d'Artois," continued the marquis, "to fight in secret, at midnight, at the Spring of St. Leon. And the Master forbade——"

"And why did you forbid, Etienne?"

"I didn't. No. The Master of Masters. . ." The marquis lowered his voice. "A stranger out of Kurdistan, one whom I recognized as a master of adepts, by the signs he gave. . . *the Master*, I now believe. . . Malik Taûs himself, the Lord Peacock incarnate as man! He forbade the duel. I feared for Santiago, and wished to prevent it, out of deference to the Master's wishes, and from fear of d'Artois, a swordsman without like or equal. So I invited Santiago to a château across the border, in Spain, set back all the clocks, sought to divert him, deceive him until, when at last he did sense my device, it would be too late for him to keep his rendezvous. Rob him of his honor, yes; make him fail in his word, yes; but I sought to spare him that meeting with d'Artois, and from the vengeance of the Master."

"And did you succeed?"

"No. Santiago detected the trick before it was absolutely too late, leaped into his car, and drove fiercely into the night, with still a chance to keep his word inviolate."

"So he fell in the duel?"

The marquis winced.

"No, *chérie*. He never reached the rendezvous. A storm arose; and he skidded on a dangerous turn, doubly dangerous on account of the rain. The wrecked car crushed the life out of him. Had I but let him go, he might have won; or at least died like a man. . . thus I killed Santiago, my friend. . . And this stranger from Kurdistan may have been an impostor, a fraud. . . Imbecile! I believed him to be the Lord Peacock incarnate!"

Christ, what a tale! Was it then the Kurdish stranger whom d'Artois had met, and almost vanquished? The

devil who had inspired the marquis to meddle, and caused the death of Santiago on that lonely road from Spain? My brain reeled with the madness of it all. . .

And then I raised my eyes again to regard that marquis who chanted sonorously to that lovely girl, serene and calm, reclining among silken cushions in the Adytum of Darkness, in the very shrine of the Oriflamme of Iniquity, face to face with its high priest. . . and this without changing expression, save to shake her patrician head in pity. . . what a woman!

Had they discovered the gagged warder? Were they returning? I was in a devilish mess, literally. Devils on all sides, and in an atmosphere of demonaltry.

The girl nodded. . . sank back among the emblazoned cushions. Drugged. Inert. The tiny pill had done its work.

The marquis rose, thrust the table behind the arras; listened to the breathing of the sleeping madonna; straightened himself to his full height. Madness and despair flamed in his somber eyes; his lips drooped; his lean cheeks were drawn. The muscles at the point of his jaw were knotted and quivering. If not the devil, then was this marquis his double: Satan overcome with sorrow, but unrelenting.

What now? Madness was his. But what form would it assume?

With swift, sure fingers he removed the silver slippers of La Belle Allzaneau; stripped from her the glittering, iridescent gown; and then the tenuous silk which clung to her form.

Cristo del Grao! What had that madman in mind? . .

And then he lifted her bodily from the chaise longue, strode up the cinnabar-strewn pathway toward the shrine, ascended the altar steps, and placed his burden upon the upraised, black palms of those great hands that reached for their prey.

Turning from the altar, he took a small mallet and struck a gong whose thin note shivered and hissed, with a rustling, lingering vibration, chilling, sighing, not full-throated as bronze should be. And from panels on either flank of the altar emerged those same hooded, sheeted figures that had passed me a short time ago, filed now to their places and knelt before the shrine, a vermilion crescent of demonaltors bowing before their chief and their god.

One of the number, after his salaam, arose and advanced to the altar steps, leaned over the brazen railing, and with a stick of rouge marked on the side of the unconscious girl; then a mark on her breast; and then on her forehead a mark. At the same time, coming from the right, just beyond my angle of vision, were four who pushed forward on rollers a massive stone trough; a trough over whose sides slopped some of the liquid it contained. Trough? No trough at all, but a sarcophagus, chiseled with Egyptian hieroglyphics! And is if by symmetry, there came from the left four others, each pair of whom bore a mummy case. These cases were placed on either side of the altar, standing upright. One, the mummy case of a man; the other, of a woman. This I knew from their sizes, and from the gilded masks which depicted the features of the deceased.

The case of the man seemed heavy. But those who carried the case of the woman bore it as though it were empty. And I wondered if indeed that could be the case we sought; Pierre and I.

The hooded figures, after putting their burdens into position, resumed their places in the crescent of devotees, leaving the marquis alone on the altar steps, facing the shrine.

Well, and at least I need fear no attack; for those who had passed me

at the gate had but doubled back and waited behind the scenes for their signal to reappear. It had all been stage-setting. And it all apparently amounted to nothing more than an initiation of the girl into the secret order of demonaltry. I relaxed and let the Luger sink into its holster.

And then I noticed what under normal circumstances I would have noted immediately; the solution of that which made both the marquis and the girl seem left-handed, and that which made the voices seem to come from my right, instead of from directly in front of me. I was looking into a mirror, into one, or three, or some odd number of mirrors which caused a reversal of left and right. Had I not shrunk back into my corner, against the door jamb, I would have noted that those who filed past me had not come directly toward me, but rather from one side. I could now distinguish my image before me, very faint, almost imperceptible, yet there, nevertheless.

So! And here I was to witness an initiation into the inner circle of demonaltry. My fears for the girl had been panic, and nerves, almost hysteria. And the mummy case, the smaller one, was doubtless that which Pierre sought.

But where was Pierre? No matter. In the morning we would return and loot the place. . . .

The marquis, after bowing before the shrine of the peacock, extended his arms, chanted in a tongue unknown to me. Then, after tossing incense into the brazier on the altar, he began anew, this time in French.

"Malik Taûs, Standard-bearer of Iniquity, Lord of the Outer Marches, Prince of the Borderland, thee we revere, and before thee we bow! Hear then our prayer, Malik Taûs, Thousand-eyed Lord Peacock, Sovereign Rebel, Dark Prince! To thee we consecrate this sacrifice on behalf of Santiago who defied thee; and for him we crave pardon and peace, for him across the Border we raise our prayer!"

"Amin!" intoned the congregation, bowing their heads to the floor. "So be it!"

A pause. And again the marquis raised his voice.

"Santiago, Santiago my friend, whose death I caused, concede to me your pardon, and accept from me our prayer! I who sent you to your death, and these my servants alike seek to make atonement!"

"Amin!"

"And this woman without like or equal, I offer to you, Santiago; and to you I consecrate her, to be yours until the end of time. Santiago, you whom I sent to your death, accept her who is the very image and likeness of her I loved very long ago; accept as my peace offering this wondrous one who is my lost one incarnate. Santiago, in the name of Thousand-eyed Malik Taûs, I offer to you this woman whom I shall embalm in rich spices and wind in linen, and encase in sycamore and enshrine beside you to be yours for ever and ever!"

"Amin!"

Lord God! A poniard gleamed in his upraised hand. I drew and leveled the Luger. . . remembered I looked into a mirror. . . dropped my eyes, sick with horror. . .

A blinding, awful incandescence flared about me, illuminating that vault with the blue-white flame of noonday sun. . . a muffled, choked report. . . the mirror before me was clouded. A dense mist fogged the air. Hooded figures rushed to and fro, confused, colliding with each other, clawing and rubbing their eyes, blinded by that devastating flame.

And among them strode one not hooded, who moved with sure, swift certitude. Pierre d'Artois, wielding a blackjack! Each swing brought down a hooded figure; down they went before those cool, deliberately,

placed strokes. . . one stroke, one man . . . the cruel precision of machinery . . . the last man had taken the count. Pierre stepped to the wall, reached behind the arras; withdrew his hand, snatched from the wall an antique battle-ax, and dashed down the passage toward me.

"Don't touch that grill!" I shouted.

"The juice, he is turned off."

And to prove it, Pierre assaulted that grillwork with his massive ax, smiting fiercely, bending and deforming the sturdy bars. I crawled through, followed him back to the Adytum of Darkness.

"Take the girl," he commanded, as, true to his nature, and never forgetting his mission, he seized the mummy case, the one designed for a woman, and led the way to the exit.

As I leaped to the altar railing, lifted the still unconscious girl from the black hands, and wrapped her in my cape, I noted that the other mummy case was empty, and that its cover had been kicked aside.

One or two devil-worshipers stirred and twitched. Others groaned. Striding over that miniature battlefield, I followed in Pierre's trace. And we made good time, Pierre and I, for the devil, though down for the count of ten, still lurked in that awful vault.

No one accosted us as Pierre led the way across the park to his car. What a pair we were: a vermilion-robed figure embracing a mummy case, and I, likewise robed, bearing in my arms a girl whose hair streamed to the ground, whose limbs gleamed brightly in the moonlight.

Well, the madman's jubilee ended in Pierre's apartment.

Lili, quite calm and magnificient in Pierre's silken lounge robe, sipped a bit of cognac and took the entire affair as a matter of course, though she did have certain regrets.

"Those lovely shoes! Monsieur Landon, perhaps you would return for them?" she mocked.

And then, to Pierre, "Do tell me what it all was about."

"*Chère petite,* it is a very long story. The stolen mummy would not interest you, directly; but my search for Madame the Princess and—what you call in English, her wooden negligée, *n'est-ce-pas?*—her sycamore case is what made me cross your trail. *Voyez!*"

Pierre showed us a photograph.

"This, Mademoiselle, does it not resemble you?"

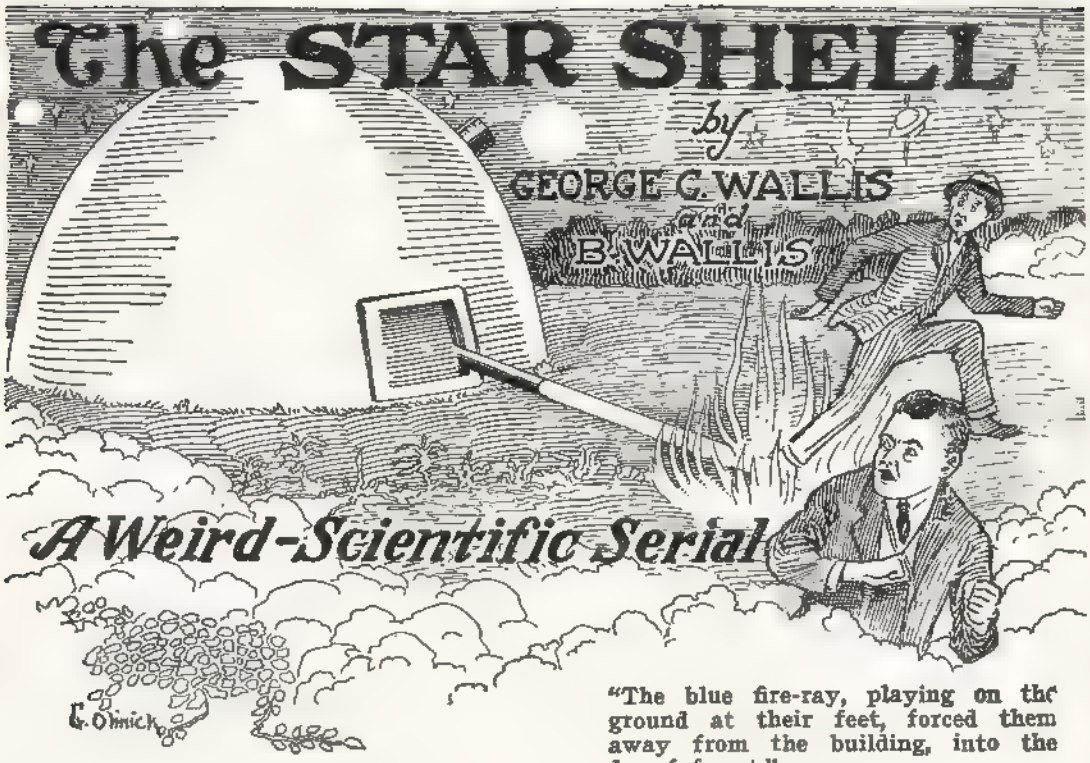
"*Quelle bêtise!*" flared Lili. "What a notion!"

And then she admitted the resemblance, acknowledged that that face of gilded sycamore, carved 3700 years ago, might pass as an Egyptianesque version of her own loveliness.

"So? It does resemble, yes? And the painting in the château, that of the mistress he adored twenty years ago, that could be your portrait of today, were not the lady's costume a shade out of date. Behold the succession of resemblances, partly real, partly fancied. That I noted, immediately. And moreover, I saw, as did you, *mon ami,* that book bound in human hide; but unlike you, I read therefrom, many strange things. Then those drums whose heads were of human hide, and the arms, and all the other trophies of death. . . death. . . death which has haunted Monsieur the Marquis, turned his brilliant mind, and made him do this madness which we witnessed.

"And the duel at St. Leon, two years ago. I knew that Don Santiago was the good friend of Monsieur the Marquis; and I knew also that there had been something very odd about that midnight meeting. Thus when I saw you, Mademoiselle, all so lovely in the sunset, I added the two

(Continued on page 718)



"The blue fire-ray, playing on the ground at their feet, forced them away from the building, into the dwarf forest."

CHAPTER 1

MARK DEXTER SURPRIZES HIS FRIEND

WHEN I burst into the big laboratory that eventful evening I got one of the shocks of my life, though it was merely a trifle as compared to what was to follow.

"Good Lord!" I cried. "What on Earth!—I knew you were doing the Edison and Tesla stunt, Mark, but this is the limit! What's the idea?"

By this time we were shaking hands and scanning each other's faces. It would be hard to find two fellows so dissimilar as Mark Dexter and myself, and yet there was a strong attraction between us. From our first meeting, and all through our college days, we had been inseparable.

My life in Mexico had thinned and tanned me, but it had left me tough and strong, and as fond of sport and the open air as ever, whereas Mark's chosen career had not done him any good physically. My talented chum, after a brilliant college life, had "run to brain." He was pale and thin, his dark hair already retreating from his intellectual forehead, his shoulders already showing a slight stoop. His eyes were the eyes of a dreamer, a thinker; but for all that there was fire, will and ambition, strongly marked on his refined face.

"Mexico has not made an invalid of you, that's clear," he said, shaking my hand as if he would never let go. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you just now."

"Not gladder than I am to be back home for a spell," said I. "It's good to have a rest from the everlasting sweltering heat, and brown skins, and greasy frijoles, and all the other southern stuff. But what on Earth

are *you* doing? The place is a cross between a munition factory and a bit out of Dante's *Inferno*. You are making your old dad's coin fly."

The huge workshop, situated on a lonely stretch of the San Mateo coastline, was indeed a queer sight. Circular saws were screaming through wood. Lathes were paring spirals of steel from spinning rods. Giant planes were plowing along huge slabs. Hammers tapped musically. Steam rose from monster vats. Hungry rolls devoured strips of silvery alloy. The glow of an electric welding arc glared blindingly across the clamor.

Mark looked lovingly at the scene.

"I daresay it seems a bit of a mess to you, Harry—a sort of jig-saw puzzle. You see, I know how the pieces fit in. Come on and have a look at the result of a few years of the toughest bit of thinking and hard work any man has ever done."

Picking our way through the workshop, we passed into a farther room, a spacious and lofty place, with a domed roof. It was clean and bare, excepting for the strange object that stood in a trestle framework in the center of the floor. It *was* a strange object. It was a cylinder of dull, white metal, with a rounded, pointed nose: a huge shell. It was quite thirty feet high and twelve feet in diameter. The whole surface of it was queerly pitted and mottled.

"That's my achievement, Harry," said Mark, with suppressed excitement. "Don't say a word till we get inside, then I'll tell you something I have not mentioned to a living soul except the prince."

"Danda Singh? He was a crank, too, I remember. I shall be glad to see him again."

"He is coming this afternoon, to meet you," observed Mark. "But up here, then I'll talk."

I followed him up a long ladder to an opening in the side of the great shell—an opening protected by double doors—and we entered the main chamber of the interior. It was like a small round room, three thick glass windows, deeply framed, breaking the monontony of the padded walls. There were chairs, a table, electric lamps, and on one side a group of coils, switches and dials. A trap-door in the floor, lifted, revealed a dark space filled with electric cells, a number of labeled tanks, and a quantity of miscellaneous stores. A trap-door in the roof, reached by a steel ladder fixed to the wall, disclosed in the upper portion of the shell two beds, with a further quantity of bins, boxes and packages. Here were two windows.

I suppose my face wrinkled itself somewhat.

"It gets me, Mark," I said at last. "I don't see daylight. All very snug and comfortable—parlor and bedroom, pantry under the floor, electric light and all modern conveniences—but what's it for? Are you going to stand a siege in it, or take it with you on a journey? It looks like a shell; but where's the gun to shoot it? It gets me!"

"Supposing I intend to go somewhere in this shell, and it doesn't need a gun to shoot it, what then?"

"Is your head quite right, old scout?" I asked. "If we were down in Mexico I should say it was a touch of fever. Yes; suppose we somehow get this thing on the move, with you inside, all set, what next? Where are you going with it?"

"I don't know exactly," was Mark's staggering reply. "But inside that shell I *am* going somewhere—and it will be somewhere no living being on this Earth has ever been before!"

"Steady, steady!"

"I am serious, Harry. I was always looked on as a sort of a queer kid at college, you know. A lecture or a book on astronomy always inter-

ested me more than games. Since you went to Mexico and Dad left me his big pile I've given my brains, my life, to thinking out and making this shell, as you call it. That's a good name for it—we will call it the *Star Shell.* I am going to shoot it to the stars—and I am going in it."

"Forget it, Mark," said I, more in sorrow than in anger (as the poet cried). "If I didn't know you so well, I should use stronger language. Just to humor your fancy, now, tell me how you are going to start this thing, and where you expect to land with it."

"First question's easy enough," Mark replied, quietly. "The *Star Shell* will be propelled by etheric pressure, after I have cut it off from the attraction of the Earth. I have discovered the secret of gravitation. The metal alloy of which the *Shell* is made is of such a nature that under a certain electric current it ceases to possess gravitative force. It then becomes subject to the outward pull of the ether, and will be drawn away, with rapidly increasing velocity, from any large mass. Once started, the *Shell* will leave the Earth and rush out into space. We shall be able to see the moon at close quarters, to visit the stars."

"We?" I gasped. "We? And what particular planet are we to just drop in upon? And how long—here, hold on! I seem to remember something about the distances being biggish. You will have to get a move on to reach Mars, for instance, 35,000,000 miles away at its nearest. You would have to hustle along at a million miles a day to get there in five weeks. Gee!"

"I can't tell what planet I shall be able to reach," replied Mark, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Our first journey will be somewhat in the nature of an experiment. As to the time it will take to reach Mars, I can tell you, unless the conditions of outer space are different from my calculations. Once free of the Earth and its atmosphere, the *Star Shell* will be repelled outward at about 40 miles per second. That would see us at Mars in ten days, or at the moon in an hour and three-quarters."

"And *we* are going in a record-breaker like that?"

"At the least, *we* are to go in it when ready," drawled a quiet, cultured voice behind us.

I turned to face Dandy—Prince Danda Singh—the young Sikh who had become Mark's fast friend, admirer and helper. I could tell by the gleam in his black eyes that he had been standing listening to us for some time. We shook hands, but I shook my head.

CHAPTER 2

THE STAR SHELL PLUNGES INTO SPACE

"I KNOW that it, to you, must seem strange, very," said Prince Danda. (He had a quaint way of making up English sentences, and no amount of teaching ever quite cured him.) "But, to us, who upon this thing have thought and worked so much, it not strange does seem, but most clear and sure. We our lives are prepared to risk, and we ask you to go with us—if afraid you be not. There should be at least three of us, and better would be four, if we knew someone else whom we could trust."

"And you expect me to believe this hare-brained junk, you precious pair of scientific bugs?" I cried. "Cut it out; I can take a joke with anybody. What's the real idea back of this thing? Honest, now?"

"We are in dead earnest, Harry," said Mark, laying his hand affectionately on my shoulder. "I mean exactly what I say. In this shell I intend to leave the Earth, to visit the planets. It is a great venture, a terrible risk, and we may never return,

but I am going to take the risk and so is Dandy. We should like you to come with us."

I could hardly resist that, nor could I read anything but sober sincerity in both their faces.

"Can you give me any sort of proof?" I asked.

"We can do that tonight, Hal. We have already tried the experiment successfully. We have a small model shell, which we can shoot out into space with a cargo of dynamite and clockwork detonator set for ten minutes. In ten minutes, allowing for the atmosphere retarding it somewhat, the bomb will be more than 20,000 miles away. If we don't see the explosion we shall know it really has traveled so far. What's that?"

A noise in the outer room, as of someone blundering over an obstacle, drew us to the doorway. The ladder was shaking, as though someone had hurriedly descended, but there was no one in sight. Mark ran down and called to a mechanic. The man was not sure, but fancied he had seen somebody hurrying through the workshop. Another man said it was the "gent" who had been there with the prince a time or two.

My friends looked grave.

"Must have been Professor Norden," said Mark. "He may have overheard us. If so, he is the only person besides ourselves who knows my secret. Even the workmen here, who have built the *Shell*, and are busy on other experimental work for me, have no idea of my plans."

"Who is this professor?"

"He is—or once was—a mathematical genius," replied Dandy. "No end of honors has he got, and a brain that was once most wonderful. He my tutor was at one time, and I have brought him to the laboratory occasionally. Many questions he asks, and much he evidently suspects. If he our secret knows, he is dishonest enough to steal it and clever enough to use it."

"He once hinted that the control of gravitation was an ambition of his own," added Mark. "I ought to have been more careful, more afraid of him—and I should have been but for the low position to which he has sunk. He drinks. Spirits make a madman of him."

"In that case I shouldn't worry," said I. "Boozers never do much good. And now see here, you two. Are you giving me the straight goods about this business? If you are I'll come along tonight and see your experiment. If not, cut me out of your visiting list."

"I can only repeat that I am in real earnest," was Mark's answer. "My whole soul is bound up in this adventure. Nervous as I am in some things, I am ready to risk my life."

"And so am I," assented Prince Danda Singh.

"I suppose I'll have to believe you," I sighed. "Well, as soon as you show me there's a dog's chance of getting back safely to Earth, I'll consider things."

"I'll prove what I have said tonight, Harry."

Mark spoke calmly, confidently, but little did we three imagine how sudden and complete that proof would be.

The night was mild and the sky fairly clear of cloud. The stars were a brilliant sight as we walked across and let ourselves into the dark and deserted laboratory. Picking our way through the maze of lathes, hammers, planes, forges, we reached the doorway of the inner room where the great *Shell* stood gleaming in silent mystery. Mark looked puzzled.

"I thought I locked the door when we came out this afternoon. It is closed, certainly, but not locked. Anyhow, there seems no one about."

"And here the model is," observed

Dandy, pointing to a small shell on the floor. "It is loaded already, and merely needs the contact making and the time fuse setting."

Whilst Dandy had been speaking, the inventor had been working the mechanism of the revolving roof, and now a great clear space of star-strewn sky appeared in the lofty dome. Then he turned to me.

"Before we go any farther, Harry, I had better explain one or two little items. This small model is made of the same alloy as the big *Shell*. When charged with positive electricity this alloy ceases to have weight, to be subject to gravitation: it is then at the mercy of the ether-strain that everywhere opposes gravitation. According to the strength of the current supplied, and the sections charged, the *Shell* can be wholly or partly robbed of attractive power. A negative charge reverses the action. You follow me?"

"Yes, it's as clear as mud, O King!" said I. "If the *Shell* can be cut off from the attraction of the Earth, it will just stop where it is—the Earth will run away from it and leave it, a lone little orphan, in space."

"You are coming on, Harry. But that is not all. By charging the *Shell* in sections I can travel about as I please—make it respond to the pull of any heavy body in any direction—leave it to be drawn to the moon, to Mars, or Jupiter—or pull it back to Earth. Its speed, as I told you, when moving freely out there, will be not less than forty miles a second. It may really be far more."

"Go easy," I groaned.

"And therefore, supposing we cut loose and head for Jupiter—an extreme case, but possible, situated as the Earth and Jupiter are at this moment, with the giant planet about 400,000,000 miles away—we should reach our destination in something like seventeen weeks."

"More than four months shut up in that *Shell*, shooting through space?" I shouted. "Nothing doing! I'm game for a lot, but count me out of this. Of course you are prepared for a trifling trip like that? You can carry enough food, and water, and air, and power, to just trot there and back again?"

"The *Shell* is already fitted and provisioned, ready for any reasonable emergency, ready to start at any moment," Mark replied, rather nettled. "Of course, not tonight, as I don't particularly want to go to Jupiter. But whether you come with us or not, we shall go somewhere. Hello! What the——?"

A sudden clanging noise rang shrilly through the place, as if someone had struck the *Shell* a sharp blow.

"There is somebody in the *Shell!*" I shouted, and we rushed to the ladder.

The prince was up first, Mark close on his heels. As the two of them stepped over the threshold of the outer of the double doors, the inner was being closed from within. Some person inside was trying to shut us out. There was a tough struggle, and not until I added my weight could we force our way in. When the door gave at last it went suddenly, and the three of us fell inward, sprawling over one another.

We were on our feet in a jiffy—to find ourselves facing the muzzle of a wicked-looking revolver in the hand of Professor Norden. I knew him on sight, though I had never seen him before—this short, stout, red-faced, red-nosed, spectacled, bald-headed scientist. He looked what he was—a mongrel, part German, part Pole, part Jew—and as spiteful as a baffled ferret.

"The first one who steps forward will die!" he cried, in a hoarse sort of scream. "You will go out—go back?"

"What are you doing here, pro-

fessor?" asked Mark, white with rage, and also a bit shaky about the gills. "Trying to steal my secret?"

"Already I know it, young pup," snarled Norden. "And I am going to use it. Get out, all of you. If you don't go in two minutes, I shoot."

This was where I thought it time to interfere. This was where athletics came in rather more useful than mere brains. We were not standing so very far apart, and before Norden or the others knew what was happening, I had seized the professor's outstretched arm in a ju-jitsu grip. He yelled with pain and dropped the weapon to the floor. Then I closed with him, singing out to the prince to lend me a hand.

We nearly downed him, but he fought with the ferocity of a trapped beast, and we were not at all prepared for his next move. It was a good thing that Mark stood out of the scrap, and kept his eyes skinned, and saw what was coming and knew what to do.

In the struggle the three of us lurched to the side of the *Shell*, where the operating levers were fixed. Before we grasped his intention, the professor shot out a free arm and hurled all his weight, in one last flare-up of will-power, upon the starting handle, the lever of the switch that sent the current into the metal framework and cut us off from gravitation.

"At least I shall take you with me!" he gasped.

I can't sort out the sensations of the next few moments. I have a hazy, blurred recollection of seeing Mark, a cry of horror on his lips, rush to the doorway and swing the metal slabs to their places with a terrific clang; of a sudden, short, fierce spasm of heat that made the perspiration start from every pore of the skin; of a fearful roar of sound and a still more fearful silence; of being pressed into the floor, shaken, bruised, and rendered breathless; of a feeling as if my head were swelling, swelling to the bursting-point; and then a merciful unconsciousness came.

Of course, I knew now what had happened. Professor Norden, in his frenzy, had started the *Star Shell* on its marvelous journey into the unknown. We had left the Earth. We were flying through the black void of space; the trackless infinite where eternal silence reigns.

CHAPTER 3

IN THE GRIP OF A FRIGHTFUL SPEED

It seemed almost at once that I regained my senses, but according to my watch I had been out of everything for quite two hours. And I was the first to recover, being the most physically fit of the four.

When I struggled to my feet—with a painful effort, for I felt as though weighted down with tons of lead—I saw that Dandy was lying motionless under a broken chair, the professor sprawling across him, and poor old Mark near the door, with a drying clot of blood on his right cheekbone.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! It was some time before I got my thoughts sorted out sufficiently to remember where I was and what had happened. Stiff and sore all over—stiffer and sorer than I had ever felt before—I dragged myself to one of the windows and looked out.

Though the night is familiar enough to me now, that first glimpse of the sky, seen from the flying *Shell*, was an awful shock. I can hardly describe it.

The sky was everywhere an intense, dead, inky black. The stars shone unwinkingly, and in all their varied colors—red stars, blue stars, green, yellow, white. Right amongst them, glaring fiercely, with a halo of luminous haze surrounding it, and fringed with red flame, glowed the

glorious sun. Below me, round and pale, and patterned with its seas and continents, lay the Earth, a globe seeming more than three times the size of the full moon. Near it shone the pale crescent of the moon itself.

I daresay the others would have been more or less prepared in their minds to face this strange sight of sun and earth and moon and stars all shining together in a sky of dense blackness, but I was the first man whose eyes had ever seen it. The sensation was creepy, uncanny. I could not know, until later Mark explained the matter to me, that light vibrations traverse the mysterious ether of space invisibly, and only when they impinge upon arresting material, such as the gaseous envelope of our planet, can we receive the impression of light. "Possibly," Mark stated, "it is a sense limitation, and to beings more highly organized space might be bathed in superb brilliance: just as we are convinced that certain insects perceive colors and sounds unknown and inconceivable to us."

I looked down at the old Earth we had perhaps left forever, and it seemed to me to be growing smaller, lessening rapidly as I gazed. In a sort of panic I rushed across to Mark and tried to rouse him. He was heavy and senseless as a log, and I began to wonder whether I should find myself shut up in this terrible *Shell* with three dead men. The interior, bathed in sunlight, was just comfortably warm, but at that thought I felt my forehead go damp with cold sweat.

However, my chum opened his eyes at last and wriggled to a sitting position.

"You look bad, Harry," he said, eyeing me quizzically, after a glance at the star-lit windows. "I see you have grasped the situation."

"Thank goodness you have come round!" I said, fervently. "Where are we, how fast are we going, when shall we stop?"

"Just what I want to know," replied Mark, rapidly recovering his self-confidence. "One thing is certain—my invention is a success! The *Shell* works! We have left the Earth; we are the first travelers in space!"

"Yes, but where are we going, Mark?"

"That's where you know as much as I do, Harry. Though I made the *Shell*, I never intended to start it on its journey in this breakneck fashion. Norden was mad. I must have a look at my meters and registers. One thing I am afraid of already is that the *Shell* is going far faster than I calculated."

"What do you mean?"

"This feeling of heavy weight. Cut off from gravitation we ought to be able to float about at will, as light as feathers. Instead of that, we seem held down to the floor. It brings Professor Einstein's ideas to mind. The *Shell* must be moving with a perfectly frightful and accelerating velocity to give us this heavy feeling. We had better waken the others now."

We pulled the professor off Dandy and soon had the latter alive and kicking. Then we roused Norden, grinned at his grimaces and grunts, and went into committee to report progress. At least, we three listened; Mark did the talking.

"We are in a terrible fix," he said, after an anxious examination of his instruments, and a long gaze at the magic sky. "It is possible that we shall never return to the Earth—that we shall die in this *Shell*—and it is all your doing, Norden. It is your mad folly that has made this journey an insane shot in the dark instead of a reasonable experiment. You have shown yourself an enemy, and we shall have to treat you as one from now on. We can't trust you."

"But—but," stammered the scared scientist, "but I am in peril just as much as you are. I was mad, but surely now we are all in equal danger we can be friends. We must work together for all our sakes."

"I'm not risking anything," said Mark, sharply. "You have only yourself to blame. We shall watch you, so that you won't have much chance to do any more dirty work. And now listen carefully, all of you. The *Star Shell* is going faster than I had allowed for; the intense cold of space affects the metal of it so as to magnify the repulsive energy many times. We are now moving far more than forty miles a second, which I thought would be the limit. And I have reversed the current, so that we ought to be slowing down."

"But what is our speed?" asked Dandy.

"That's just what I can't tell you," Mark answered. "Look at this dial. The pointer on it, at forty miles a second, should revolve once every quarter of a minute. Every revolution of it represents a distance of 600 miles."

"But there is no pointer; it's gone!" we cried, together.

"That's where you are all wrong. The pointer is there now, but it is whizzing round so fast that you can't see it. You know that a wheel can spin so rapidly that the spokes become invisible. Well, that is the matter with my pointer. What our speed may be I can't even guess. If the needle were to slow down just enough to show it on the dial as a blur, that would prove the *Shell* to be traveling not less than six million miles an hour. And I can't even see it as a blur!"

Professor Norden, groveling on the floor, groaned heavily. The prince and I stared at Mark, and then at the speed dial, and then back again at Mark. There didn't seem to be any words suitable for the occasion.

The silence in the *Shell*, flying so soundlessly through the black void, was like the silence of the grave.

CHAPTER 4

RACING AN ASTEROID

"THEN what can we do?" asked Prince Danda, at last.

"Nothing—nothing but wait," said Mark. "Now that I have reversed the electric current, gravitation will assert itself in time and check our frightful momentum. We shall be approaching Jupiter by then, perhaps. Already we are near the orbit of Mars. The danger that next threatens us is the risk of banging into one of the asteroids—that crowd of little planets careering about between Mars and Jupiter. They are such an erratic crowd—all shapes and sizes, and in all sorts of orbits. By switching gravitation off and on, I must try to dodge any inconvenient ones."

"It has just struck me that I could do with a bite and a drink," said I, to relieve the tension. "It gets monotonous, gazing out of the windows."

Mark went below and presently came up with a hamper, a kettle and a coffee-pot. He opened a small door in the padded wall on the sunny side of the *Shell*, and put the kettle in. Five minutes later he drew it out, the water boiling.

"Electric radiator in there?" I asked.

"Cheaper heat than that, Harry. It is simply a little oven in the *Shell's* wall, warmed by the sun. If you were to touch the metal exterior on that side, in spite of the cold of space, you would burn your hand. Pass your cups up."

"My nerves aren't what they were," grumbled Professor Norden. "Have you any brandy aboard?"

"Yes, but only for emergencies; not for you," said Mark.

There was a cunning gleam in the professor's eyes, and I guess that was the moment he began to plan more mischief.

After we had finished the meal, Mark put us through what he called "drill." He showed us all the working of the *Shell*—the cylinders of oxygen, the apparatus for absorbing the poisonous gases evolved in breathing; the supplies of food, water and electric energy; the operating and recording instruments; the double doors for ejecting undesirable objects; and the cameras for taking still and animated photographs. Then we portioned out our eating and sleeping periods by clock-time.

It was an hour after the meal that the space-sickness seized us. I don't want to go into details, but try and imagine the worst sea-sickness you have ever experienced or heard of, and make it a hundred times worse, and you will have some faint idea of the awful sensations we suffered from. Our poor internals, cut off from gravitation, must have been in a terrible muddle. We lay and rolled about the floor in agony for hours, and not one of us cared a hang whither we went nor what was happening.

At last the worst was over, and as soon as I felt well enough to crawl to the nearest window, I fetched the others up with a shout.

"A planet—a world, rushing to meet us!"

Mark, limp and haggard-faced, came to my side.

"One of the asteroids—one of the big ones," he said. "It is moving right across our path—or we are moving across *its* path. We shall want all the speed we can get, if we are to clear it."

He cut off all gravitation once more. The brilliant object, already looking twice the size of the full moon, was rushing along in its orbit at several miles a minute, but compared with our own meteoric speed it seemed to be merely drifting toward us—drifting, with irritating slowness, but also with irritating sureness, to put itself right in our way.

"Here we are in space, with billions of miles of elbow-room, and yet this snippety lost world must try and be in the same spot!" mused Mark, savagely. "It will be a near thing, if we miss it at all. And if we hit it, well, good-bye! We shall be smashed like an empty egg-shell thrown at a wall."

Nearer and nearer came the asteroid, and we saw it for what it was—a round, bare, rocky world, void of sea or river or visible life, with not even the suspicion of an atmosphere. The glare of sunlight reflected from its lifeless surface almost blinded us. Nearer and nearer it came, and we held our breaths in an agony of suspense.

There was a jar, a shock, that shook every loose object in the *Shell*, and now the asteroid was on our other side, receding swiftly.

"We are clear!" cried Dandy. "The danger is over. We grazed in passing—a touch that of the slightest was."

"Good old *Star Shell!*" I shouted. in the relief of the moment. "But what's up with you, Mark? You don't smile."

"I am wondering what next, Harry. Now that we are clear of the asteroids, there is nothing between us and the planet Jupiter. If I had intended to go there, I couldn't have started the *Shell* at a better time and place, but I didn't. Even at the speed we are now traveling it will take too long to go there and back with our present supply of air. And I can't even see the pointer on the dial yet. To put it bluntly, the position is this: if the *Star Shell* takes us as far as Jupiter, and we can't make a good landing, and we don't find

breathable air to fill up with again, we can't even start back. And if the *Shell* goes on much longer before it slows down and begins to return, we shan't have enough air left to see us home. That's all."

"That's all!"

"Well, not quite," said Mark, fixing his glance on the professor, who shivered and shrank away, as if he knew what was coming. "There are four of us. If there were only three, we could last out longer. If there were only two, those two would have a sporting chance of getting back alive. You have all noticed our double doors? We open the inner, put in the narrow space any object—or person—we want to get rid of, shut the inner and then open the outer door. That object—or person—is thrown out into space and will no longer trouble us? You see my meaning?"

"Not that!—ah, not that!" shrieked Professor Norden. "I have done wrong, I know, but spare me! Not that!"

"It is not yet time to decide, but when the time comes that is what we must do," said Mark. "You, professor, have brought us into this peril, and your life is of the least value. You will be the first to go. After that? We shall draw lots."

We shuddered. This was where old Mark scored. He hadn't the prizefighter's physical courage, but he had what is a far finer thing—mental courage. He saw what had to be done if we were not all to be lost, and he did not flinch from action.

"And meantime, it's your turn to have a nap, Harry. You others had better leave me alone to watch the dial and make some calculations. Good night."

CHAPTER 5

A FROZEN WORLD

It seemed a tall order—to go aloft and climb into bed and try to sleep—to go to sleep in a huge shell shooting through space at perhaps 10,000,000 miles an hour—out where no human beings had ever been before—beyond the orbit of Mars, beyond the asteroids, on the way to Jupiter. To go to sleep, not knowing whether I should ever see the Earth again, even whether I should ever wake.

But the close air, the limpness that followed the sickness, and the nervous strain, told on me. I went fast asleep. Dandy woke me suddenly.

"The time it is to be quick," he said. "We are at the end of the journey nearly. Already the big planet to us is very near. The speed has fallen, so that Mark can control us. We upon one of the moons must land."

I sprang up, wonderfully refreshed, with a strange feeling of lightness and relief. I felt quite active as I dived through the trap-door and rattled down the ladder.

"I see you are feeling the loss of weight," said Mark, without lifting his eyes from the end of a small telescope or his hand from the operating switch. "The *Star Shell* has lost its momentum at last and got down to normal speed. There is Jupiter, and yonder, coming our way very considerately, is Europa, the planet's second satellite. We have overshot the planet itself, and I am trying to come to rest here, and find some fresh air. Be ready for a bit of rough and tumble. I only hope we land before the dark."

The sight from the windows was wonderful. Around us shone the host of the stars, and behind us, the sun, shrunken now to a quarter of his usual size, glared across the void. Quite near, and growing bigger every moment, was a great white crescent world, larger than the full moon—Europa, the second satellite of Jupiter. As it moved, the shadow of night was creeping over it. Not far away, its huge bulk filling a great

space of sky, hung Jupiter himself, the giant planet, 1200 times vaster than the Earth. It was all belted with concentric rings of cloud, and turning so quickly on its axis that we could see the motion distinctly.

But it was Europa that interested us, for there it was we must land and find the life-giving air we were in need of.

"How shall we know whether it has an atmosphere, and if it be breathable?" I asked.

"I have a special little attachment with valves. There. When we land, I open the outer end and close it quickly. This tube will then be filled with whatever vapor there may be outside, and a simple chemical test will show at once what we want to know. Look out; we shall soon know the best—or the worst."

The satellite had seemed to be rushing headlong upon us, but now, under Mark's skilful guidance of the *Star Shell*, its motion settled down to a steady crawl. Mile by mile we drew nearer to that dazzling crescent, until it appeared to us that we were nose-diving into a huge, cuplike valley. More working of those wonderful levers, and the *Shell* tilted, fell sideways, turned turtle with a jerk that scattered us all over the floor, and then came to rest upon its base with hardly a tremor.

We were at rest on the surface of another world. And not a moment too soon, for, almost on the instant of landing, the sun sank below the horizon and we were plunged into the night. We were enveloped in dense darkness, and the *Star Shell* went icy cold—bitter cold that struck to our vitals and numbed us in every limb.

Mark switched up the lights within, and then, pressing a knob, turned on the great searchlight in the top of the *Star Shell*. The long, intense beam of radiance flashed out and swung around us, illuminating a scene of mystery. The ground was carpeted with stunted brushwood, and over all that bleak, withered landscape snow was falling. A rising flood of white filled up the hollows. As the white flakes fell they thickened into streams and drifts, and whilst we stared, the whole expanse that we could see was deep in its wintry mantle. There was no sign of life; the stars shone sharply in as black a sky as that of outer space. The silence was awful, and the cold, in spite of the now active radiators, penetrated to our bones.

Mark extinguished the searchlight and turned to his test-tube.

"For the air now," cried Professor Norden eagerly. "It will be cold, but it will be fresh—it will be pure, and we shall live!"

Without a word, Mark operated the valves of his apparatus. He drew the tube from its air-tight funnel, brought it to the table, and made his test.

"I was afraid so," he said, as if speaking to himself, though he looked at the trembling scientist. "There is no air. The tube is empty. Europa has at present no atmosphere."

CHAPTER 6

A DEAD WORLD COMES TO LIFE

"NO AIR? Ah, now I understand!" cried Norden, throwing himself into a seat in an attitude of utter despair.

"But I don't see that, Mark," said I. "You must have made a mistake. There must be air here. We saw dead shrubs, and running water, and snow."

"Of course. Snow it could not, if no atmosphere there were," added Danda Singh.

"That wasn't snow you saw at all—it is not snow that is at this moment lying about us," was Mark's astonishing statement. "Doesn't the black sky and the cold and the silence tell

you anything? What you call snow is simply liquid and solid air."

"Gently, gently, my son!"

"Fact, Harry. You know that the moon always turns the same face to the Earth: this satellite does the same to Jupiter. Every portion of its surface, during the journey round the planet, is alternately flooded with sunlight and exposed to the cold of space. This cold is so intense that even air must freeze unless in great volume. This satellite, about the same size as our moon, has never had a deep atmosphere. It probably retains a few shreds in the deeper valleys, such as this into which we have fallen just at sunset. In the day, this air melts and forms a thin skin of atmosphere, and, if I am right, a kind of vegetation grows up and as quickly seeds and withers before the night comes again. The *Star Shell* is now on a dead and silent world, lying amongst drifts of frozen air."

"Then we have only to wait for daylight, after all?" exclaimed Norden with fresh hope. "And that will be—let me see—yes, about forty-three hours, as Europa revolves around Jupiter in less than three days. We shall not have much time to investigate things."

"Time enough, I fancy," said Mark. "I intend to get some wonderful photographs, for one item. Then we must fill up our tanks. At present we have just to grin and bear this terrible cold as best we can till the sun comes to set us free."

We bore it, but without the grinning. We shivered and sneezed, cowering over the glowing radiators, wrapped in all the rags we had, and not one of us could do more than doze off at intervals through that long, long night. Shining above us like a huge moon, but twenty times larger than the moon appears to us on Earth, and always in the same spot overhead, was Jupiter. Mark reeled off paragraphs about it—its weight, size, mass; its four large satellites and its five tiny ones; its distance from the sun, its rapid rotation, its cloud-belts; but we were all too stiff with cold to take much interest.

And then we saw the gleam of sunlight on a distant hill, and as the quick dawn leapt into the valley, the miracle of the four seasons was compressed into forty-three hours.

Perhaps you won't believe me, but you have not been to Europa and seen it. The line of the dawn swept across the valley like a line of living fire. As it came, the frozen air melted, ran into liquid, rose in steam, dissipated into invisible vapor. The ground cracked. There was a stirring in the forest of dead brushwood, and a million new shoots jumped up, pushing their green fronds eagerly to the light.

Warmed by the sunshine, fascinated by the sight, we stood at the windows watching the plants grow. They were long, sinuous trees running their knotted branches along the ground, each foot or so sending up leafy branches. They were in a terrible hurry, eager to live the short life that would be theirs before darkness and winter came down upon them again. Amongst this sudden, furiously active foliage, a cloud of dusky insects appeared and hovered.

"It's a nightmare!" cried Norden. "See how these hungry plants fight! They strangle one another in their mad battle for sunlight and air and room!"

Mark put out another tube and made a second test.

"We have seen a dead world come to life," he said, "let us go out for a walk. There is air around the *Shell* now, quite breathable. Just one word of warning. As on our own moon, the attraction here will be one-sixth of what it is on Earth. If you try to jump a couple of feet, you

will leap a dozen. Now for the outside."

We swung open the heavy doors, let down the ladder, and descended. The air was warm and moist, but to us, after our long confinement, it was beautifully fresh. In my eagerness I sprang quite fifteen feet at the first jump—and landed in the clutches of a vicious family of yellow-leaved plants.

Their twining, clinging tendrils, shooting out in all directions, seized me fiercely round each leg and threw me to the ground. I got up, luckily saving my hands from a similar fate, and pulled the left foot free. The right, wriggle and tug as I would, I could not loosen. Shouting to the others to look out, I got my pocket-knife to hack through the clutching fibers.

It was an awful job. That twining vegetal arm held me in a viselike grip, and the more I hacked the tighter it held. It wouldn't keep still, either, and was as hard to cut as tough rubber.

At last, with an aching arm, I managed to win out, and had time to look around. So fast did this furious forest grow that the tops of its branches were now as high as an average man, and one-third of the *Star Shell* itself was hidden by the trees. Here and there a few brown and yellow blooms already glistened in the sunlight. And when I reached the others, I found them all in the same plight as I had been. They were all fighting the fierce, wriggling plants.

I lent a hand, picking my way very carefully, watching every footstep, and after about an hour's hard work we were back at the base of the *Shell*, standing in the clear space covered by its shadow, where the plants had not yet arrived.

"This most strange is," said Danda. "Can we not this place ever leave because of these snaky things?"

"For me I leave not the *Star Shell* again," declared Norden. "My legs are all bruised and sore. I will stay here and see that the air-tanks are filled whilst the rest of you go exploring."

Mark looked quizzically at the speaker, and it was evident that the same thought was in all our minds.

"We haven't asked you what you intend to do, professor," he said, very quietly. "If you won't come along, well, you won't; but one of us must remain to keep an eye on you. As I shall want Harry, it must be your pleasure, Prince, to stop and entertain our distinguished prisoner."

"But how are we to get through this fighting tangle?"

"It will be easy enough in a few hours, I hope," said our wonderful pal. "You see, when the first rush of spring fever is over, and the plants have covered and appropriated most of the ground, they will get busy on leaf and flower and seed, and cease to be dangerous. Then you will have noticed that even now they are not very active in the shadows and on the higher ground."

So we waited, and then, taking food and water, a camera, and a few scientific instruments, Mark and I set out, leaving the professor and the prince, very glum and cool toward each other, squatting at the foot of the *Shell*.

"We mustn't be away more than ten or twelve hours, and in that time we can cover a lot of ground and collect a lot of information. We are going east, and the farther we go the more advanced this queer vegetation should be. Look out, there!"

It was treacherous going for a time. We had to step very gingerly to avoid the clutching tendrils of that dwarf forest, but after a dozen miles (remember we could walk six times as far and as fast as on Earth) the trees became less troublesome. They were full of leaf and bud and bursting

flower, and their undergrowth made a carpet of springy, fibrous matting for us. Later on we actually found some of these quick workers in fruit and seed. I wanted to taste the small brown berries, but Mark wouldn't hear of it.

"Can't afford to risk losing you here, Harry. Put a few in the bag. These specimens will puzzle our botanists when we get back to old England."

"When. Any plans for our return?"

"If all is well when we reach the *Star Shell* again," Mark replied, "I propose to start right away. We shall only need to cut off the attraction of Jupiter and Europa for a few minutes, and the pull of the sun will do the rest. How's the time? Well, a little bit farther, to the top of this ridge, and then we had better turn back."

We climbed the ridge, finding few plants there, and the air thin and cold as we ascended, and peered down into the valley beyond.

It was a cuplike depression, smaller though similar to the hollow into which the *Star Shell* had fallen, full of the same sort of growth. But there was something else, something that gave us a thrill, a sudden shock.

In the middle of the valley, perhaps three miles away, a dazzling white object rose above the forest growth. In that thin, still atmosphere we could see it distinctly and noted that it was smooth and round, with a domed roof. It stood in a clearing.

"What is it, Mark?" I asked, clutching my friend's arm.

"I don't know, but I think it is a sign of life—of intelligent life. Come on; we have just time to go and examine it before we turn back."

CHAPTER 7

THE WHITE DOME

Going in huge, bounding leaps, clearing three or four yards at a stride, we went down the slope toward the singular white dome. In less than a quarter of an hour we had reached it.

It stood in a circular, open space—a level piece of ground beaten flat, upon which the berried plants did not intrude a single root—and it was perfectly round, perfectly smooth, purely white.

"It gets me, Harry," said Mark, as we paced around this strange building wonderingly. "It is an artificial structure, that's plain; but what it can be for, and what sort of living beings have made it, I can't even give a guess."

"Looks as much like an astronomical observatory as anything," I ruminated. "Only I don't see a telescope sticking out. Still, those marks up there look like the edges of a possible opening."

"I believe you have hit it, Harry! But, if it is an observatory, where and who are the astronomers, and how do they get in or out? Hullo! What do you think of this? Some sort of door, if I am not mistaken."

In our walk round we had come to a definitely marked circle drawn on the smooth, white wall. In the center of the circle a ring-bolt was fixed.

A ring-bolt! Here was forged metal—evidence of life indeed, and of life akin to our own.

"Seems a strange sort of door, anyhow," said I.

It was strange. We couldn't do anything with it. We pulled and tugged, we pressed and pushed, tried to turn it, worked it up and down, but nothing happened. We banged on the wall, using the ring as a knocker; we shouted with all the strength of our lungs; nothing happened.

"It's a bad egg; if the occupiers are in, they are out," said I. "At least, to us. Isn't it time we started back? I'm feeling a bit nervous, out of sight of the *Star Shell*. Suppose anything went wrong. Fancy being left here to face the night!"

"I don't fancy it, Harry. We had better have a snack and a drink, take a photograph of this thing, and start."

It was whilst my chum had the camera poised in his hands that the inmates of the building revealed their existence. The dome slowly revolved, a portion slid sideways, and a shining metal tube projected through the narrow opening. But it certainly was not a telescope.

"Look out, Mark; they are going to shoot!" I shouted.

There was no sound, no flash. A sort of blue ray came out of the tube and struck the camera. The metal glowed hot, the cover smoked, and as Mark threw it down with a cry of pain and astonishment, the thing burst into flame.

We shouted, holding up our hands, but the tube still pointed at us, and the blue fire-ray, playing on the ground at our feet, forced us back and back, away from the building, into the dwarf forest. Of the beings in the building we obtained no glimpse.

"They don't want us, and they object to being 'took,' that's very evident," said I, dragging my reluctant friend away. "If we don't want to be frizzled up, we have to beat it, so get busy."

We "got busy," and as soon as they saw we were retreating, the invisible ones drew in their tube and closed the opening.

"Very unfriendly of them," commented Mark, as we tramped back toward the *Shell*. "I suppose they could somehow see us all the time we were prowling around, and thought the camera some kind of a weapon I was using. Might have let us explain."

"Perhaps they didn't feel inclined to wait till we had taught them English," I said. "Still it is hard lines to have to go home without knowing more about them."

Little we thought then how much we should come to know of these mysterious folk, how they would learn English. Little did we guess what a difference in our fate that brief excursion to the white observatory had made.

Topping the ridge, before we took the slope down into our own valley, we halted and glanced back at the glistening white object. There was no sign of life or activity about it. Mark sighed, and we faced round.

CHAPTER 8

ABANDONED TO THE NIGHT

THE valley was now a huge cup of green and yellow bloom, and we tramped along easily through serried ranks of seeding trees. Already the more advanced bore clusters of nuts. The dusky insects buzzed around us harmlessly. Now and then there would be a loud report, as one of the brown nuts burst violently open, scattering its seeds far and wide with the violence of small shot.

"I should think this is the most malicious and vindictive vegetation in the solar system!" I growled, after a peppering that made our faces tingle.

"Anyhow, it's given up trying to leg us down. Come on; I have a sort of uneasy feeling about Norden."

"The *Star Shell* is there yet, all right, Mark. It seems more like home, now that we can see it. Only about another mile, and then good-bye. Shan't be sorry to nose-dive for Earth."

A minute after I had spoken there was the sharp report of a revolver—another—and another. Without wasting breath on a word, we tore for-

ward at top speed. Owing to the thick forest growth we could only see the snub-nosed top of the *Shell,* not what was happening at its base. On Earth that mile would have taken us ten minutes; we did it in two.

Being more in training for this sort of thing than Mark, I was the first to break through the scrub and see what was wrong. Letting out a yell that ought to have been heard on Jupiter, I put on a terrific sprint, whipping out my gun as I ran.

The position was serious enough. Holding Danda Singh down by the throat with one hand, the professor was raining blows upon his victim with the butt end of a revolver. Danda struggled gamely, but fanatic frenzy seemed to be giving Norden superhuman strength. When I yelled out, the prince collapsed and his assailant flung him off. Then, with an angry snarl, the professor leapt for the steel ladder and climbed up into the *Shell* as nimbly as a cat.

I fired twice, missing him each time, and then I rushed for the ladder myself. By the time I had my feet on the bottom rung, the professor was inside and the double doors were shut. Mark shouted something, I felt the ladder swaying under me, and realized in a flash that the *Star Shell* was rising. There was nothing for it but to let go. I sprang clear and fell into Mark's arms, knocking him over.

There was a faint hiss, a subdued shriek in the air, caused by its swift passage through that shallow atmosphere, and then silence.

When we picked ourselves up, the *Star Shell* had vanished!

Mark, rubbing his head, staggered to his feet, and there we stood, gazing helplessly at the silent sky.

We were marooned on Europa, abandoned to an awful fate, left to perish in the coming glacial night. And such is the power of imagination that already there seemed to be a chilly tang in the air.

"Now what are we going to do?" I queried blankly. "Write our epitaphs," I added grimly, answering my own question.

"Better see how Danda is, and tell him of our discovery first," said Mark. "I'll tell you my idea later. The loss of the *Star Shell* is not all the mischief. The mathematical and chemical formulæ of my invention—the result of years of work, and much too intricate and detailed to trust to my memory—is hidden in a secret panel in the inner wall of the *Shell.* But look after Danda."

The prince, though bruised and shaken, was not really very much the worse for his experience. It seemed the professor had pretended to be most friendly and had put Danda off his guard completely. He had asked for a match, and whilst Danda was searching his pockets, had attacked him. The prince had fired his revolver to attract our attention, and then, taken at a disadvantage, had been overpowered.

"So I am feeling a bit sore and dazed—but if that were all!" he said. "This building, now—could we not try it again?"

"That is the only thing we can do," responded Mark. "It is the one possible chance of saving our lives. A poor chance, but our only one. Left to ourselves, without shelter or food or warmth, without the means of procuring any, it can only be a matter of hours before we are frozen to death in a frozen atmosphere. Thank heaven it will take longer for this little planet to cool down than it did to warm up."

"Why? I don't see it," I said impatiently.

"Natural law—in one case you have a plus heat, an actual bombardment by heat vibrations; in cooling down there is merely an absence of this activity. There are no cold vi-

brations, it is simply a cessation of atomic life. If Europa possessed no atmosphere, then this cessation would be almost instantaneous, but the atmospheric blanket, tenuous though it is, will quite perceptibly retard the process."

"Well, what then?" I queried moodily.

"There are living beings on this world," he affirmed calmly.

"They didn't encourage us before," said I. "Anyhow, we can try them again. Have we time to reach them before sunset?"

"I think we shall just manage it, but we shall have to travel," said Mark. "We shall be going east, remember; going to meet the sunset, and none of us is up to concert pitch."

We didn't talk much as we footed it back along our tracks toward the valley of the round white dome. We had no breath to spare, and there was nothing useful to say.

Now that we were in a hurry, it seemed farther, much farther, than when we had strolled along in the morning. And we had all had a tiring time, and precious little real rest since leaving the Earth. By and by Mark and Danda began to lag, and I had to slow down.

"Go on and save yourself, if you can, never mind us," they panted, pegging on gamely.

"Cut that out," I grunted. "We stick together. We are nearly at the top of the hill, and then it is only about ten minutes downhill going."

"Yet it already much colder is," gasped the prince.

It was certainly easier going, once we were over the ridge and in the valley, making a bee-line for the white object of our forlorn hope; but I scarcely dared to look at the darkening sky ahead, and the chill wind that met us withered the brown leaves of the dwarf trees. Was that hoar-frost that glistened on a piece of higher ground? Were these snow-flakes that fell like solitary feathers around us?

Could we do it? Could we reach the strange building and gain admittance before the awful, cold night came?

CHAPTER 9

THE WONDERFUL MEN OF JUPITER

The icy breath of the approaching night swept fiercely over the dying forest as we staggered into the clearing. The eastern sky was almost inky black, already glittering with the many-colored stars; the sun was touching the western horizon. Drops of liquid air splashed and froze into solid white cakes upon the ground.

With the last energy of despair we ran to the domed building and banged with the ring of the bolt.

"If they won't have us in, it's good-bye, friends," said Mark, his teeth chattering. Our breaths hung in the air like clouds of milky steam.

But, as he gasped out the words, the ring-bolt moved! It turned, kept turning, and we saw that the circular section of wall in which it was fixed was slowly coming out. It was unscrewing outward. Slow at first, it turned faster and faster, showing the bright spirals of a metallic thread. When about two feet of this huge screw-stopper projected from the side of the building, it swung on a hinge, disclosing a lamp-lit tunnel through which it was possible to walk by stooping. A voice—a very human sort of voice—called something.

We could not understand the words, but the meaning was plain enough, and we needed no pressing to accept the invitation. Out of the tail of my eye, as the round door swung to behind us, I caught a flashing glimpse of a whirling tempest of white flakes. We were rescued only just in time.

We stumbled clumsily through the tunnel, through that ten-foot wall of silvery metal, warmed by the caress of the heated air that met us, and stepped down into the main apartment of that strange building.

We were, I fancied, ready for anything. We were prepared to find these inhabitants of Europa of almost any shape and size. I should not have been in the least astonished to come face to face with intelligent beavers, civilized octopuses, or gigantic ants. What we did meet surprized us more than anything we had yet seen on our incredible journey.

There were only two beings in the room—and they were human—they were *men.*

There was no doubt about it. Standing five feet high, but well-proportioned, dark-haired, clean-shaven, dressed in black suits not so very unlike our own, if somewhat looser in fit, pale-skinned and refined of feature, these were essentially men.

Somehow, after the first shock of surprize, we felt quite at home, felt as though we were welcome guests.

Mark stepped forward and held out his hand.

"We owe you our thanks, gentlemen," he said. "You don't know what I am saying, of course, but I think you understand. You didn't want us in before, but you have saved our lives this time."

For answer the taller of the two men lifted his right hand and stretched up to lay it on our friend's shoulder. He smiled, talking quite eloquently for a couple of minutes.

It was a queer game, and Dandy and I couldn't help grinning. The other chap saw us, frowned, and then joined in the grin.

"Here's where we get stuck, old boy," said I. "We are in a pretty plight, and we could do with a lot of explanation, and yet we can't get a word across."

That was where I was wrong. As if he had read my thought, the smaller man pointed to the long black tube that stood, clamped to a marked circle, on a strong metal column in the middle of the room, touched it, and gazed earnestly at me.

"Tel-e-scope!" he said.

We jumped with astonishment. He touched the side of the building, glanced at us all in turn, and said:

"Wall—side-wall."

"Great Scott!" I cried. "He can read our thoughts! We had better give him a few lessons. How's this?"

And I rapidly indicated the roof, the floor, my two companions in turn, our clothes, and various objects out of our pockets. In each case the small man accurately repeated the appropriate word or words I had in mind.

There was no doubt about it—he could do thought-reading. And when he spoke he seemed to find the English words pleasant and easy to use.

By this time we were feeling very drowsy in that warm air, after the cold we had experienced, and the prince, by way of a hint, stretched himself at full length on a rug on the floor and closed his eyes. I followed suit, and they carefully covered the two of us with other rugs. Mark, I noticed, with lazy curiosity, as I dozed off, was standing by the telescope, grimacing and gesticulating to the taller of the two men—whom we afterward knew as Delius.

When I woke, Mark was still on his feet—but he and the two men were talking rapidly—in English!

"Get up, Dandy," I said, nudging the prince, "here's the biggest wonder yet. Listen to them. They can do it better than you."

"Yes, yes," Delius was saying, "we expect to return to Jupiter—as you name our home—in a short time, when our task here is ended. See,

your friends are awaking. You must tell them what we have done."

"Yes, by all means tell us how you managed to teach these chaps," said I. "It seems too good to be true, but fire away. Then it will be your turn for a nap."

Poor old Mark looked ready enough for a rest. His eyes were strained and blood-shot, his cheeks were haggard, his hands trembled.

"I didn't teach them at all, Harry. They just put me into a trance—hypnotized me. Then each of them hypnotized the other in turn, and whilst in the mesmeric state we learned each other's languages. I can talk quite well in Jovian—as we may call the language of Jupiter, where our new friends really belong—and they seem to like English. You two will have to be put through the mill next, and then we shall all be ready for the trip to the big planet."

"Give us breathing time, Mark. Let's get the hang of it all. Here goes—stop me if I'm wrong. The idea is that these chaps can read thought somehow. They put you into the mesmeric state and picked and packed your brains to such a tune that you can now talk their lingo and they can use English. It is not a pleasant job, but we have to go through with it. These people really hail from Jupiter, and expect to go back there soon, taking us with them. Is that right?"

"You have it, Harry."

"But," queried the prince, "how can we this world leave? The *Star Shell* has gone. Are these people clever so much more than men? What are they doing here?"

"In some ways they are far more advanced than our humanity," answered Mark. "The fire-ray, for instance. And the metal of which this building is constructed. It is heat-proof, and as you can see for yourselves, though it looked opaque from outside, it is quite transparent from within. They can make it transparent at will. In other respects, they could learn from us. These two are atsronomers, completing a star map, which can be done so much better here in the really dark nights of Europa. They came, of course, with all their supplies, in a space-ship similar to the *Shell*, and another will come to take them back when their work is done. As to the *Star Shell*, ask my friend, Mr. Delius."

"Your travel-vessel, Mr. Williams," said the taller of these wonderful men from Jupiter, "is at present upon our world—the greatest planet of the solar system, which is our home. It is at rest, rather damaged with its fall, in the aerial landing place in the city Nadir. The man who was in it is injured, but will recover."

That bowled me out, center-stump and sent the balls flying all over the field.

"Put us under the influence and get it over," I said, resignedly. "You can't surprize me any more. Lead on, Dandy MacDuff, and look pleasant."

CHAPTER 10

A DESPERATE PLIGHT

OF COURSE I can not say whether we appeared pleasant or otherwise during our mesmeric dose of intensive training. Mark says, unfeelingly, that we were a pair of sleepy idiots, but anyhow we came through all right, though we felt very seedy afterward. When we woke to the dawn of another day of forty-three hours, we found that we could talk freely to Delius the astronomer and Oberon, his assistant. From now on I shall give our conversation as though we all used English, whereas we often employed Jovian when speaking to the Jovians.

We learned that there was a small wireless installation in the dome, and by that they had got news of the land-

ing of the *Star Shell* on Jupiter. Professor Norden had started blindly, blunderingly, had traveled too quickly, and only the density of Jupiter's cloudy atmosphere had saved his life. So great was the heat caused by the *Star Shell's* plunging through that atmosphere that he had been nearly roasted. He was so far gone, in fact, that had not the shock of landing cracked the *Shell* and burst open the doors, he would have been unable to release himself.

"But our people dragged him out, and wretched as his condition was, read his thoughts," said Oberon. "We had already wirelessed them of your terrifying appearance here, and they at once sent us word of your companion's arrival, and how he had treacherously abandoned you to die in the night. His journey, remember, was a short one. When you came and asked for admission the second time we knew your danger. How came you to have so evil a comrade with you on this most daring journey? His act was not worthy of a man; it was the deed of a barbarian."

"Do you know from whence we come?" asked the prince.

"Certainly; we discovered that when you were in the trance," was Oberon's reply. "You have come from planet number three of the solar system. You call it Earth; we have named it Solitaire, because it has only one moon. Yours is a great achievement, you have shown greater daring than we could imagine possible—we who regard a journey from Jupiter to this world and back as wonderful—what we can not understand is how such a man as your companion could live amongst such a clever race."

"You don't know us yet, friends," said Mark dryly. "There are all sorts amongst us—good, bad, and very bad. Don't you find it so here?"

"It is wonderful," exclaimed Delius. "Until yesterday we did not believe that your planet could be inhabited at all—we thought it too small, too near the sun—and now we find that its people are a mixture of good and evil in the same race. It is wonderful!"

"Are you all good, then, on Jupiter?"

"Unfortunately, no, Solitarian. But there are with us only two races of men—ours, the civilized, and the other, the barbarian. In the long-past ages, when humanity on Jupiter evolved from the apelike creatures of the forests, it divided into these two distinct races. Our race has keen brains, pale faces, small physique. With us cleverness and goodness went together. As we progressed, we grew more refined, less selfish, until such a treacherous and evil act as that of your companion would be impossible to us. We are civilized. But the others, the Barbarians, a people of smaller heads and larger bodies and darker skins, have not advanced with us. Some of them have glimmerings of decency and honor, but most of them are savage and selfish, cruel and deceitful, envious and revengeful. They are not our equals in science, but they are cunning and unscrupulous, they multiply rapidly, and they dispute the planet with us. Even now a great war is in progress, and we fear they gain ground."

"But you are cleverer than they are; you have a wonderful weapon in that fire-ray you drove us off with on our first visit," I said. "Why don't you conquer them once and for all?"

"We drove you off that first morning because we thought you were hostile," replied Delius. "We did not wish to do you any harm beyond destroying what we then imagined a weapon. And that is our attitude toward the Barbarians. We never attack them, never kill them, except in self-defense. There is sometimes great slaughter in our battles, but

when they retire, defeated and weary, from our forts and cities, we never pursue them. We release all our prisoners after treating them well. And so it may be long before civilization covers the whole of Jupiter—before our sane and orderly life supplants the reign of savagedom."

"But why don't you conquer them, if you can?" I persisted.

"No doubt we could," was the reply, "if we cared to wage open war upon them and treat them as they treat us. But we think we know a better way. We do not believe in taking life if we can avoid it. We defend ourselves; no more. Some day, we hope, the Barbarians will learn from us, will outgrow their evil nature, and all will be well. But if not, if they should conquer and we should be annihilated, at least the crime will not be ours. Our hands will be clean of needless bloodshed. Our souls will pass over into the future life unstained. To live gently and humanely, gaining wisdom, doing all the good we can and as little harm as possible—that, to us, is the essential nature of a civilized man."

"We have some people on Earth like you," said Mark. "We call them saints, fanatics, Quakers, and sometimes worse names. We often admire them, but we find it hard to carry out such ideas. I should like to see more of your people—and I must confess I would like to have a look at the Barbarians as well!"

"You will soon have the opportunity, Mr. Dexter. The ship comes to take us home today or tomorrow. We are feeling rather uneasy about the present attack of the enemy, as we have had no wireless message since the one that told us of the arrival of your *Star Shell*. That particular sending station may have been taken by the Barbarians. If so, they must be nearing the landing station we use."

"And in case you—we—all of us—might into the hands of the Barbarians fall? Would it dangerous be?" asked Prince Danda.

"It would probably mean a hideous death," replied Oberon. "Let us hope fortune favors us, for we can not stay here much longer, as our supplies are running out."

We were glancing upward at the thin, pale crescent of Jupiter, and suddenly, out of the dark sky, a shining object came into view. It was falling rapidly toward us, but its speed was visibly abating, and as it settled gently in the clearing we saw that it was a metal shell, smaller than ours, but similar in shape. Oberon pulled a lever and the door of our building rapidly unscrewed itself outward and swung open. The astronomers hurried out, we three after them, to meet a man who emerged from the space-ship—another denizen of Jupiter.

Though the newcomer was evidently very curious about us, he was in great haste, and had no time to spare.

"We must start at once if we are to reach our landing place before the enemy arrive there," he said. "Have you the star map?"

Delius showed a roll of parchment he had snatched up on leaving the white building. He and Oberon then closed the door by turning the ring-bolt, and we entered the Jovian shell. We found ourselves in a small room whose metal walls were as transparent as the clearest glass.

The pilot slammed the double doors behind us—they had double doors, too!—and started the shell. It rose with a jerk that made us feel sick, turned a somersault, and then dropped down toward Jupiter far more swiftly than was comfortable. The inner room was very small, we were closely crowded, and breathing soon became so difficult that it was not easy to talk. We gathered that these shells, used only to and from Europa, carried only enough air for

three men for the four hours journey at full speed. Now there were six of us. We were going at the extreme velocity at the pilot's command.

Jupiter grew larger, and between the rolling bands of its voluminous clouds we caught dim glimpses of continents and seas. Nearer and nearer we drew, passing now through the dense cloud layers, and sinking safely to ground at last.

But the men of Jupiter were pale with fear. We had fallen amid the ruins of a great building. It was still smoking from the fire which had destroyed it. The vast level plain around, lit here and there by blazing villages, was dotted with the encampments of a great army. Their waving weapons glittered in the dim light of the two moons then overhead.

"We are too late; we have fallen amongst the enemy," said the pilot. "They will capture us when we go out."

"But need we leave the vessel yet?" asked Mark.

"If we do not leave it we shall either die of suffocation, or perish with the ship," was the answer.

The thrilling adventures of the Jovians and their companions with the Barbarians and the Gigasaurs, and the flight through the Forest of the Great Red Weed, will be described in WEIRD TALES next month.

NOVEMBER

By A. LESLIE

A warrior priest in tattered cloak
  Strides o'er October's hills;
He casts a gelid fettering yoke
  Athwart the hastening rills.
Upon the woodland's festive dress
  His disapproving frown
Falls, and, as contrite, they confess,
  A somber robe of brown—
A symbol of repentance—he
  With cold hands sternly spreads
O'er rainbowed vine and glowing tree;
  Then gravely onward treads.

The PARASITIC HAND

by R. ANTHONY

"It seized the wrist of one of the nurses and held it in a relentless grip."

[*NOTES FROM THE DIARY OF DR. BURNSTRUM*]

1. THE EXTERNAL HAND

JUNE, 6, 1925.—This morning I encountered the strangest case of my twenty years of practise. John Pendleton, a young real estate agent of Cassia City, requested a physical examination, particularly of a growth on his left side. After he had stripped I saw that he had a bandage taped to his side.

Upon removal of the bandage the growth proved to be a *completely formed right hand,* its base (or wrist) fastened at the curve of the eleventh rib, directly beneath the armpit. The hand was slightly open, the palm turned outward and upward. In size it was that of a babe's several months old.

"How long have you had this?" I asked Pendleton.

"Always, as far back as I can remember," he answered. "I was born with it, so I was told. But it wasn't always the same size."

I looked up in surprize. "Not the same size? What do you mean?"

He hesitated and flushed. "Well, it—it was——" He made a quick gesture and added energetically, "Doctor, don't think me a fool, or an imaginative idiot. I am a college man and not given to silly imaginings. It's the truth I am telling you, remember! That hand used to be small, very small. But in the last three months *this hand has been growing steadily.* And you see its present size!"

A parasitic hand it was, clearly so. I knew the thing, for I had seen such structures before. But a growing

hand! And growing after the host had reached maturity! That seemed impossible.

By accident I placed an index finger against the palm of the hand. Immediately its fingers closed upon my forefinger and *gripped it firmly.* Here was surprize! Usually these parasitic growths are inactive, without nerves and provided with a very scant blood supply. But the grip of this parasitic hand was firm and strong, like that of a babe. It took considerable effort to release my finger, so tenacious was the grip.

And after I had freed myself, it continued to close and open, much like a small babe's, and finally made an infant fist.

Pendleton nodded as he observed the experiment. "That's what it does to me," he said. "But only since the last six weeks. It never did that before then. Now it's a nuisance. It clutches at everything I put on,—at my underwear, my shirt, my pajamas. The only way I can keep it from pulling and tearing at my clothes is to bandage it and tape it fast to my body. Even then I feel it wriggle and clutch at things. It's bothered me a lot. What does this thing mean, doctor?"

"Well——" I hesitated.

"Go ahead, doctor," Pendleton urged. "I've been told that it's a sort of parasite. But I don't understand exactly. How the deuce can an extra hand be a parasite? Why should a hand grow from my side? Remember, I was born with it!"

"You probably were a twin," I explained, "at least in the early stages of your embryonic life. In fact, you and the twin probably came from a single egg. Identical twins, you know, come from a single fertilized egg. Sometimes such twins are equally developed; more often one twin is better developed than the other. What it means is that the twins compete with each other during embryonic and fetal life, and one may develop at the expense of the other. As a matter of fact, *one twin may absorb the other,* sometimes completely so, sometimes leaving a few traces such as a hand or foot. Apparently you absorbed your twin nearly completely. This hand is all that is left of him."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Pendleton ejaculated in wonderment. "But I clearly see how that is possible and that your explanation fits. But look here, doctor! Then in a way I must be two personalities merged in one body—myself and the other twin." He paused and his eyes grew wide with some astonishing thought. "Doctor! Do you—do you suppose that the personality, the soul, of the other twin is still intact and is now trying to establish itself in this growing hand?"

"Of course not," I said firmly.

But while I photographed him and bandaged the hand the idea suggested by his question kept revolving in my mind. I may as well put down my ideas of the matter:

If the interpretation of twins is correct, then Pendleton is the autosite and the hand is all that is left of the parasite. But what became of the personality, the soul of the parasite, when its body was merged into that of the stronger twin, the autosite? If we allow it entity, then the fact that the parasitic hand, after being dormant for twenty-three years, is now growing, would seem to indicate that the parasite was dominated by Pendleton until he had attained his full development, and that now the dormant personality of the other twin is asserting itself and trying to establish its own proper self. A strange theory! Yet it seems to fit! How else account for the growth?

JUNE 7, 1925.—I have the general photographs and the X-rays before me. The X-rays show that the

hand is completely formed, all carpals, metacarpals and phalanges being clear and of proper shape. A rudiment of radius and ulna are present, but fade away near the point of attachment of the hand. The muscles and fasciæ of the hand are attached to the intercostal muscles below the eleventh rib. Blood supply from an intercostal artery. A doubtful spot may be a ganglion for the nerve supply.

June 15, 1925.—Pendleton in again today, after a week's absence from town. At my question, "How is the hand getting on?" he answered shortly, "See for yourself, doctor."

He stripped, and I proceeded to remove the tape and bandages.

I started back when I saw the hand. "Why, it has grown!" I exclaimed. "It seems twice as large as last week. Like that of a child of five or six years!"

Pendleton nodded grimly. "That's why I told you to see for yourself, doctor! I wanted you to be sure about that fact. What are you going to do with it?"

"Remove it," I said firmly. "This week! It should not be a very serious matter."

A queer look came into Pendleton's eyes. "You don't suppose that in removing this—er—this—what is left of my twin, we would be—er—doing murder?"

I smiled at the fancy. "No, hardly. You may liken this hand to a tumor. Removal of a tumor does not constitute murder, does it? A tumor is a parasitic growth. This hand is a parasitic growth. We remove parasitic growths before they become too dangerous. Murder?"

"Well, no," he said. "But I had a crazy dream about it the other night," he added apologetically. "I dreamed I saw my twin and that he said, 'You have had your share of life at my expense. Now I want my own. Don't you dare tamper with things. I'm going to have my way.' And then I woke up."

"Rather obvious," I commented. "A natural sequence of our conversation of twin entities, or rather, of one twin overcoming the other. Nothing to it, my boy." I patted him on the shoulder. "What do you say about three days from now? That will give you time to prepare. Not a serious operation, you understand. But it is good to be prepared."

He assented, and after taking a few more photographs I dismissed him.

July 21, 1925.—San Francisco, Calif. A telegram just received from Pendleton: "Come back to operate. Urgent." The illness and death of my father had called me to California before I could operate on Pendleton. And the disposition of the estate required a longer absence than contemplated.

I wired back, "On way in two days. Expect me by twenty-fifth."

July 26, 1925.—Back in Cassia City. Pendleton met me at the station this afternoon. He looked pale and thin and haunted. Despite the heat he was shivering. "Thank God you have come, doctor!" he cried. "I am going insane."

I looked at him curiously. "You don't mean that the hand——"

"It's—it's growing, doctor!" His eyes held a wild and frightened look. "It is larger—and a *part of the forearm has grown out!*"

I stared at him in unbelief. "Hardly possible," I said.

"But it is, doctor," he insisted. "Doctor, you haven't known me for a fool. This thing has given me no rest for a month. It is always twisting and pulling, as if it were trying to reach into me for something. It's driving me mad!" Cold terror was in his voice.

The taxi stopped at my office and we hurried in. Pendleton stripped

quickly and jerked off the bandages. "There!"

He was right. The hand had grown and now was the size of that of a vigorous boy of fourteen or fifteen. But, in addition, the *lower half of a forearm had grown out!*

JULY 27, 1925.—Removed the parasitic hand from Pendleton's side this morning. Would not repeat the operation for a million dollars. It was a terrifying experience.

General and local anesthetics used. But while P. responded excellently, the parasitic hand remained active; in fact, it seemed to be animated with a fighting spirit. It seized the wrist of one of the surgical nurses during the preliminaries and held it in a relentless grip, so that she fainted in horror.

Later, when I proceeded to make the first incision, it seized my wrist and with remarkable force tried to direct the scalpel *toward Pendleton's heart.* Only by dropping the scalpel did I avoid stabbing P. to death.

I then applied anesthetics to the hand itself, with no appreciable results. Finally, in desperation, I pushed a wad of cotton into the hand, threw a loop around its wrist and had one of the nurses hold it taut. By thus misleading and misdirecting its efforts I was able to proceed. (How silly these words sound, as if I had been dealing with a separate entity! And yet that seems to be the only plausible assumption that would help to explain).

Throughout the operation the hand kept up its writhing and clutching motions. As I made the final cut it jerked loose from my hand, fell to the floor and then fastened around the ankle of the chief surgical nurse. In horror she dropped the instruments, screaming hysterically, and ran out of the operating room and fainted in the hallway.

I darted after her and removed the fiendish hand. Even then it kept up its autonomous struggle. It was with a feeling of relief that I dropped it into a jar filled with preservative and returned to complete my work on Pendleton.

I was careful to remove all traces of the attaching structures, and also treated the vestiges with X-rays to destroy all rudiments of the growth.

The operation, though simple, and normally requiring perhaps half an hour, lasted nearly four hours, because of the constant interference of the parasitic hand. Brent, the intern in charge of the anesthesia, the three nurses and I were complete wrecks at the end of the ordeal. After we wheeled the operating table from the room and turned the patient over to the special nurse, we found that the nurses had fallen to the floor, either in a faint or exhausted.

Brent looked over the room. "Rather like a shambles today," he remarked in ghoulish humor.

I nodded and dropped into a chair, and knew no more. I believe I fainted also.

August 10, 1925.—Pendleton dismissed from the hospital today. Only a circular scar indicates the position of the parasitic hand.

2. THE INTERNAL HAND

MARCH 5, 1926.—Pendleton dropped in this morning. He looked worried and thoughtful.

"You're not sleeping well, my boy," I told him.

"You wouldn't sleep well, either, doctor, if you felt something clawing within you."

I manifested surprize. "What do you mean?"

He smiled wearily. "Exactly what I said. Something clawing and pulling within me. And right at the place where that hand was removed."

"Hm!" I muttered. "That sounds rather curious."

"Call it crazy, but I know what it is like! It is as if a hand were gripping lightly, shoving things aside, pulling at me, as if somebody—doctor, *that hand is coming back!*"

I looked sharply at him. No, he did not look silly. Of course, like other physicians, I knew that the imagination can produce astonishing delusions. But Pendleton did not seem to me to be of that sort.

"Strip and get up on the examining table," I ordered tersely.

With a sigh he obeyed. I could find little. The circular scar showed signs of disappearing. Below it the abdomen seemed faintly distended, but not enough to be symptomatic. The stethoscope revealed only the normal sounds, and palpation was similarly uninforming.

"Let's see what an X-ray will show," I suggested.

March 6, 1926.—Just examined the X-ray prints. Nothing important indicated, no signs of congestion as in a tumorous growth.

I went back through the files for the X-rays taken last June. Comparison showed that some of the internal organs had been displaced. The stomach, for one, was pushed to the right a distance of nearly two inches.

This discovery surprized me, and in my astonishment I dropped the print. I bent down to pick it up, and jerked back in amazement. For from a distance I saw what had escaped me in a closer view: *a hand was outlined within the body,* to the left of the stomach.

I picked up the print and examined it carefully. No, it was not a positive structure. It was merely that certain structures had been pushed aside and that the vacated portion had the outline of a hand. No evidence of actual entity, only the handlike outline.

A puzzling case! Is Pendleton right in saying that the hand had returned? But it isn't an actual structure. A phantom, then?

March 15, 1926.—Pendleton complains of internal pains and difficulty in breathing. I have prescribed sedatives.

March 20, 1926.—Pendleton ordered to the hospital last night. Another X-ray taken, with orders to rush. Just examined the plate. The hand-shaped space has increased in size and has pushed upward. The technician called my attention to it. So she has noticed it, too! But there is no sign of a tumor. Just an absence of structures, an outline of a hand. What to do?

March 22, 1926.—Pendleton suffering and in agony. "It's reaching for my heart!" he groaned. "Can't you do something, doctor?"

I gave him a strong sedative. After that I discussed with Brent the chances of an operation. But operate for what?

After that I went to the surgery and told the nurses of the possibility of operating on P. in a day or two. Miss Cummings, the chief surgical nurse, and her two assistants paled at the announcement, and then did something rather unethical. They refused.

"No," said Miss C., with a shiver. "No, doctor! I can't work with you on that case. I should faint with terror."

Her two assistants expressed themselves similarly.

"Please, doctor! Don't ask me," said Miss Cummings. "I'll—I'll never forget how—how that—that *thing* seized my ankle." She collapsed at the recollection and began to cry softly.

"Do you wish Pendleton to die without a chance?" I asked gravely. "I must do something, I am afraid, but I do not know what to do. I do

not know what is troubling him. He is suffering, that is evident. The X-rays tell too little. As it is, I must proceed on a pure guess. I do not know what I'll find. But it is Pendleton's only chance. That is, if you will do your duty."

"Duty!" The appeal to duty was effective. Miss Cummings smiled faintly and said in a low voice, "Very well, doctor! I'll try!"

Her assistants nodded in fearful assent.

March 23, 1926.—The climax came this morning. I was making the rounds of the patients and stopped in Pendleton's room. He had slept quietly last night, he said. "Still, I feel queer, doctor! As if things had come to a decision. Sort of ready for the final battle. It's going for my heart, I know, trying to take my life for its own. Can't you do something, doctor?"

I reassured him and remarked that we would probably operate on him tomorrow.

"Thank God!" he muttered. "I don't think I can stand this much longer. Do you think you can rid me of this—whatever it is?"

"I hope so," I answered. "In fact," I added, quite contrary to my actual belief, "I feel sure that I can. I've been studying up this matter and know something definite now."

My fabulation gave him confidence and he seemed more cheerful. So I left him and went down the corridor to see other patients.

Scarcely ten minutes later I heard a fearful scream, a choking cry of "Help!"

I rushed into the hallway and saw the nurses making for Pendleton's room. But they stopped at his door and shrank back.

I ran up and pushed them aside.

Pendleton was in a turmoil, his bed a cyclone of whirling sheets and blankets. He was twisting, tumbling, and bounding up and down, his groans fearful to hear.

Just a few seconds! Then the sheets were whipped aside and I saw Pendleton. His face was red, eyes blood-shot and staring glassily, the mouth wide open, chin pendent, and tongue protruding.

"He's—he's—got me!" he gasped; his body rocked uncertainly on his lips in a rotary motion; a final "A-a-ah-h-h!" Then he snapped erect, and fell over on his side.

Pendleton was dead. I tried restoratives, but it was no use. The coroner, Dr. Bidwinkle, performed the autopsy, in which I helped him. We found the abdominal organs pushed aside as indicated in the X-rays. Just above this the diaphragm was ruptured, the lung shoved aside, the pericardium ripped open. The heart was contracted and furrowed, as if *a fully grown hand had squeezed it until it stopped beating.*

Dr. Bidwinkle was astounded. "Of all the crazy things!" he muttered.

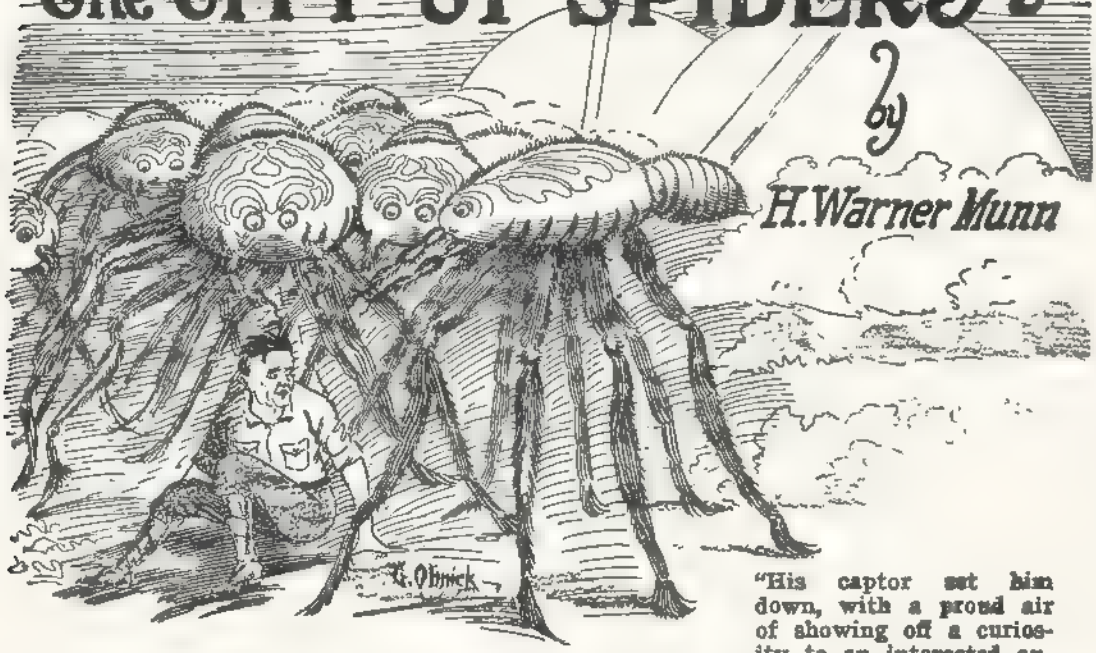
So I told him of the case and also showed him the photographs. "Hell!" he exclaimed, after I had concluded. "You and I, Burnstrum, don't know it all! I think you're right, but we can't afford to expose ourselves to possible ridicule. Your X-rays and witnesses wouldn't convince one out of ten physicians. There are some people that you simply can't convince! So why bother? Here's what I propose to put down on the certificate: 'Death from hemorrhage induced by internal rupture.' Do you agree?"

"Yes, it will be better that way," I said. "But kindly note this!" I added, turning to Pendleton's body. I reached over and placed the fingers of my hand—the right hand—into the impressions or furrows of Pendleton's heart. *The fingers and thumb fitted the grooves.*

The CITY of SPIDERS

by

H. Warner Munn



"His captor set him down, with a proud air of showing off a curiosity to an interested audience."

IT WAS on the 12:30 train from Athol to Boston that I met the man with the beady eyes. I mention the eyes particularly, for they were the distinctive features; it is very odd that they are all that I can remember of his appearance. Vaguely I recall that he wore a gray suit, rather light for our changeable November weather, but even that is uncertain.

It was a cut-rate day, with a slash in prices for an excursion, and the coach was well filled. He got on at Gardner, with a small crowd that hustled him down the aisle and washed him beside me, so bewildered that without bothering to ask me if the other half of my seat was taken, he plumped himself down with a relieved sigh.

"Rather cool," I thought, and without knowing it I must have spoken aloud, for he nodded brightly with a quick little snap of his head, saying, "Yes, isn't it?"

Amused at the natural mistake, I determined, since he was so friendly, to strike up an acquaintance to while away the tedium of a three-hours ride and incidentally perhaps to learn something that might be of value to me in a novel I am writing. Every man has in him one good story if it can only be dug out, but some are buried pretty deep.

I forget our first words, but we exhausted the subject of the weather rather thoroughly and were pleasantly drifting into a discussion of our fellow passengers, when I noticed a movement on his sleeve.

It was one of the common barn-spiders that are so often seen festooning rafters with velvety soft hangings of dove-gray. Probably chilled by the cold wind outside, the warmth of the car had brought it out of its concealment to reconnoiter.

A spider gives me the creeps, now more than ever that I know why, but then as always I felt a surge of revul-

sion, struck it off his arm and crushed it with my foot.

He was smiling oddly when I looked up. "Do you know why you did that?" he said.

"Because I hate the things!" I answered. "Always did."

"I think the word you mean is 'dislike'," he replied, "but *I* can truly say that I *hate* them, for I know more about them in one sense than any other living man on earth today. Shall I tell you why?"

"Do!" I said, smiled a secret smile within me, and prepared to take mental notes, for I scented a story at last.

I. INTO UNKNOWN COUNTRY

"MY NAME is Jabez Pentreat," he began; "my mother was English and my father a Welsh miner. They moved to this country in 1887, two years before I was born, as work was scarce and living but a bare existence in the old country. Here they found it but little better, although with more ambition they might have become moderately well-to-do. When I was young, things were in a bad way for us, father worked spasmodically, while mother took in washings to tide us over hard times. We never had much money.

"I went to grade school until I was fourteen, and was then obliged to leave in order that I might bring in a few dollars by my bodily labor. Brains counted for nothing in the manufacturing town where I lived. It was one of father's favorite sayings that 'Book-larnin' never did nobody no good!' So you see I was up against it. Three years later I ran away from home.

"I found work in Boston in connection with a fruit-importing company, and learned something of the world, as represented by the harbor-ports of South America.

"In one of those little coast towns I met a man who was to change my life. You have heard of Sir Adlington Carewe?"

"The man who astounded the scientific world with his masterly monograph on *Possibilities of the Insect World?*" I asked.

"That was he," answered the man with the beady eyes. "To him I am indebted for all my knowledge. At his own expense, I finished school and entered college. At his desire, I concentrated upon botany, entomology and other kindred studies, for he hoped that I should take his place in the line of discoverers when he was gone.

"Well, I can say with pride that his pains were not wasted upon me, although he is not where he can appreciate the changes that time has wrought upon that crude roustabout that I was then.

"I understand that he is on the west coast of Africa at present, experimenting with the higher forms of apes.

"South America always fascinated me with its magnificent opportunities for studying insect life. It is a forcing-house for vegetation, and in its dank, steaming jungles, for thousands of square miles untouched by white feet, who knows what marvelous things may exist, all unknown to the outer world? I have found a few, but I have only skimmed the edges and never expect to learn much more, although I leave again in the spring.

"Have you ever paused to think of the swarming life that goes on day after day, beneath your feet, busy with its own affairs, as you with yours? Another world goes about its business of loves and hates, of living and dying, of little engineering works as important to them as a Brooklyn Bridge or a Panama Canal to us, although one step of your foot can destroy the work of days.

"There are grass-eaters and there are carnivores that prey upon them,

and others that in turn feed upon the slayers. There are cities in miniature, slaves and masters, workers, idlers, miners and aviators, and all this teeming life may be in your own back yard, unnoticed except when your wife complains because the ants persist in finding the sugar-bowl, and the flies 'just will get in somehow.'

"And remember, this life is alien to us. Although it is so similar to us in some ways, it is a world in itself, far from humans. One writer, I have read, remarks in a joking way that it may even be alien to this planet.

"Here is a thought that I would like to have you ponder. While all other insects have their appointed prey, each feeding upon one certain enemy, herbivore or plant and rarely touching other types of food (thus by the wise provisions of nature keeping down the swarming life that otherwise would overwhelm humanity), the spider feeds indiscriminately upon all!

"The spider! Dread ogre of the insect world! How he is feared! Not only by his prey, but also by man, against whom, by reason of his size, *and that alone,* he has but little power.

"And South America is the insect paradise. Nowhere else will you find such impenetrable morasses, such dank and steamy jungles, such unbelievable monstrosities, in both vegetable and animal kingdoms.

"But I digress. To my tale, then, and think your own thoughts. I ask for no comment or interruption.

"In search of a sable butterfly, with a coffin outlined in white upon each wing, of which only one collector has ever secured a specimen, I came at last to Ciudad Bolivar, which lies in Venezuela.

"In this town I obtained eight native Indians, who were invaluable at times and nuisances at others. We searched in that mysterious mountain land of Guayana, entering where the Caroni River empties into the Orinoco. The Caroni's waters are combed by cataracts and rapids, but are well-known for fifty miles,—here the dense woods begin and man's knowledge ends, for excepting myself, I believe no white man has ever explored those forests.

"It is one of the mystery lands of Venezuela, the never-never lands where almost anything can happen and usually does. Usually a white in that section is rather a being to be taken care of, as white men are more valuable in a gift-producing way alive than dead; but there are tribes of nomadic Indians, head-hunters by choice, that roam the dismal forests, and to them the head of a white man, shrunk to the size of an orange, is their Kohinoor or Great Mogul! Not far away live the Maquitares, a tribe of blonds, almost white, and at a greater distance, the Guaharibos, whose savagery has never allowed the head-waters of the Orinoco to be discovered.

"My Indians sometimes heard their drums growling to one another far away in the steamy tropic nights, but they came always from the north and south, never from the west toward which we were pressing. On the sixth day from the river, we heard them behind us, but still far away; and as we cooked our meals in the *tambo,* a rude shelter from the night dews, such as the rubber hunters farther south construct, sometimes we wondered why they were upon all sides but never before.

"On the ninth day we heard nothing but the ceaseless drip-drip-drip into the swampy ground and occasionally the roar of some dead forest giant crashing to earth, chocked to death by parasitic vines that hid the tree from sight. That night the hunters came back empty-handed. We

had not seen any animal all day, not even the usual troop of monkeys that howled down curses at us, swinging along under the forest roof, dropping fruit skins and nuts upon us and warning all life for miles that strangers were at hand.

"We made hungry camp, for we traveled light and my men were disposed to grumble because we were in unknown country and no one knew what lay before us.

"The black butterfly was given up now, but I determined to press on three days more, and then to give it up as a bad job and go back, for I already had enough specimens to repay me for my trip.

"Before I curled up in my hammock, I shook it to dislodge any insects that might be in its folds, and out dropped a large spider, the size of my hand. I smashed it with my boot and at the same time saw another. As I struck that one, screams arose from my Indians and they dashed for the fire. One was literally covered with the vermin and dropped before he reached the light. In a moment we loaded the blaze with brush and had a bonfire that roared six-foot flames.

2. *PRISONERS OF INSECTS*

"You can not imagine the scene that met our sight! The things covered the ground and trees all about us. A carpet of gray was moving and rustling continually back from the light, and as the flames shot higher we could see that the twigs and branches hung low with their weight. Now and then one would drop with a plop on the ground as the light struck and scuttle over the backs of others till it found a place to rest. My hammock was now filled with the crawling things as a saucer is heaped with berries, sickening gray creatures with jet-black eyes that glistened hungrily, and all intently watching us.

"We could hear a kind of low clicking and chittering as they opened and closed their mandibles. It seemed as though they were talking to one another while they waited for us, in a curiously knowing way, and those pinpoint eyes watched and gloated most obscenely expectant.

"The body of the dead man was just outside the circle of light, and all night a swarming heap of spiders surged over and around it, while my Indians fed the fire for their lives, and race and caste were forgotten as we huddled, massed about the fire, sweat raining from us in the terrible heat.

"Morning came at last, and as the sky began to brighten, the gray horrors grew thinner until only a few stragglers still roamed near the clean-picked skeleton; and when the sun rose they too crept to hiding places, leaving only the white bones to tell the story of that frightful night.

"When all were gone, my Indians begged me to turn back. I refused, although my own inclinations pointed in that direction. I kept bold face and pointed out that by going west we would avoid the savages and leave this dreaded spot behind us. My head man looked grim, but said nothing. So on again! On into the jungle, fighting our way through thick tangled undergrowth, followed by dense clouds of mosquitoes and gnats, the only life we saw that day, besides ourselves.

"About noon, although we could not see the sun through the riot of vegetation, we found a small stream of clear water which abounded in small fish.

"We dined royally on fish and fruit, in the midst of a deathlike stillness. Not a leaf rustled, no birds sang, not a monkey or any other animal did we see that day, and in the

same breathless hush we made our tenth and last *tambo* that evening, having covered perhaps fifteen miles during the day.

"Keeping in mind the former night, we selected a clear open space for the erecting of our shelters, brought in an immense quantity of wood and sat around the fire in that charmingly complete and unqualified democracy of man when a common danger threatens.

"Before long, just as the drums snarled faintly to the east, a little black and red creature scuttled out of the wood, bustled down to the water's edge and drank daintily. I recognized one of the most venomous of the arachnids, usually the size of a silver dollar, but this specimen was easily five inches across his scarlet-barred body. I determined to have it, and cautiously loosened my butterfly net from my pack. This breed is very timid, although its bite is so deadly, and I crept up on it with the utmost care.

"About five feet away, it saw me, and instead of darting away, it jumped in my direction. Out of pure fright, I crushed it flat, and the scenes of the night before were repeated almost identically, but now there were many of the new species mingled with the gray demons that had dragged down the bearer. It seemed as though there were concentric circles of varying types, arranged about a central point, and the nearer we approached the center, the more horrible and huge grew the individuals that composed each belt. I began to wonder what lay farther on!

"Again we shivered around a roaring fire, speaking only in low whispers. The natives believed that our besiegers were forest devils, enraged at us for intruding into their private fastnesses.

"Several times I feared for my life that night, for dark looks were cast at me, and twice there were those who advised strongly that I should be flung out to the filthy things as a sacrifice. But they could not quite screw up their courage to that point, for they knew that I would not submit tamely, and they feared that the taste of blood might enrage the creatures into a rush which would wipe out the survivors.

"A sleepless night! A night of horror, beneath gloating, incredibly malignant eyes! A night that was a cross-section of eternity!

"About two hours before morning, I dozed off, being startled awake again almost instantly by yells of fright. Before me just outside the firelight crouched a gigantic monstrosity, hairy and tremendous. Its bloated abdomen was barred with black and silver, the head almost hidden from sight by a yellow mop of fur, from which projected jet-black mandibles, furiously vibrating as it watched us through red, vicious eyes.

"Behind those eyes, I sensed a personality, keenly intelligent. I found myself waiting for the frightful thing to speak and was horrified at the thought. You can not credit, I know, but I who *saw* am telling you the truth. I believed then, that fearful spider was as intelligent as you or I, in a more limited way, and I can assure you it is an absolute fact that the other hideous vermin acknowledged it as their superior!

"It stood at least a foot and a half high and I should judge that it would have tipped the scales at about twenty pounds. It walked about the fire at a safe distance, and carefully observed us twice from all angles. Then it moved off in a westerly direction and we saw the others draw back from in front of it respectfully, leaving a broad path, down which it passed, and they closed in solidly again.

"The same actions took place as on the preceding morning. Scatteringly they vanished with the dawn, leaving a few stragglers that seemed to regret the necessity that drove them off.

"There was no question now about what we should do. Rather than spend another such night, we would have braved a thousand savages. About 10 o'clock in the forenoon therefore we started back, but we had gone too far. Before we had gone a mile on our back-trail, we heard rustling in the bushes and crepitant pattering as of many raindrops, while sometimes we could see small gray bodies bounding along beside us.

"Still we pressed on. The march became a trot, and the trot a wild disorderly rout. We flung away our packs, our weapons, and our clothes in a mad dash for anywhere, but away! We mounted a small knoll and looked back. A sea of gray, black and red lapped around us, like an island almost level with the water, over which the waves threaten momentarily to break. Slowly from all sides they crept in, rising higher like the chill waters of death. We broke clubs from the trees and prepared to die.

"Then came that horror of the night, hustling on from the west, with five companions that matched it in size. The resistless torrent that was just lapping over the crest of the knoll stopped and receded. The six came closer, scrutinized us and started back down the bank, pausing about ten feet away as though we were expected to follow.

"We did! We all had the same thought at once, to kill the most hideous ones and then as many more as we could before we died. So we ran down the slope, and the man in front of me crashed his club through the largest of the six.

"Instantly we were covered from head to foot with crawling insects, and as we rolled over and over, shrieking and howling with fear, feeling the spiders pop and squelch beneath our weight like ripe plums, an acrid nauseous stench arose.

"As we lay there, half dead with sick terror, I noticed that no more were on me, the masses had withdrawn, and one of the larger insects stood very close to my face, on each ebony mandible a drop of venom glistening. Perhaps it was our first visitor, but they all looked alike to me.

"I jumped up. The Indians lay on a red noisome carpet of crushed bodies and we were all covered with a pulpy mess. One by one they stood up, and we discovered that not one of us had been bitten. Then the hordes opened invitingly again a westward path, and we walked down it as prisoners. The prisoners of insects!

"But one stayed behind. He was the man who had destroyed the large spider. Apparently at a signal, the mass closed in about him, cutting him off from the rest of us. He tried to run to us, as they forced us down the trail, but in an instant he was a staggering bellowing heap of vermin, that tottered a few steps and went down. Before we were out of sight, his howls had become moans, and we knew what the end would be.

"So with one of the great, yellow-headed brutes in the lead, one at each side of us, and two bringing up the rear, we came again to the fatal *tambo* number 10 and passed westward, following the brook, the swarms surrounding us on all sides, as thickly packed as leaves.

3. THE SPIDER KING

"About a mile farther on, the brook emptied into a small river. This we followed down the right-hand bank, till the middle of the afternoon, when we struck a well defined path, hard beaten by much travel.

"The throng of gray spiders now began to disappear, having reached their farthest boundary, the five black and silver guards still remaining, and many of the red and sable fellows. But when a short time later, the path was barred by an immense crowd of frightful monsters, similar to those that guarded us, the small spiders also returned to their own zone.

"Just as dusk was falling, we marched out of the jungle into the open, and, surrounded by hundreds of silver-barred brutes, were forced down an incline into a valley. It was bare of vegetation, and in the center stood several stone buildings clustered about a larger and more pretentious edifice. These were windowless and doorless, being entered through a trap in the flat roof. They made me think of the nests of trap-door spiders.

"As we neared these buildings, a jaguar, or *tigre*, as the natives term it, came racing down the valley, and behind it poured a hideous mob that hid the ground from sight beneath a palpitant, undulating surface that made my skin crawl to watch. He staggered nearer as though he sought the protection of man, and I saw that his tongue hung out as he panted in the last throes of exhaustion. On the beast's back rode a large spider, which urged the poor animal on to death, and as they reached the nearest building, sank its poison into the beast's spine, and *El Tigre* dropped like a stone.

"Now we saw a forecast of our own fate. It was plain that we had been brought to this gathering place to be butchered. Meat on the hoof, less troublesome to bring than if it were dead!

"A wave of frightened animals dashed up, a chattering monkey or two, many hares, snakes that writhed in agony, half crippled by bites and dragged along by their captors, lizards that hissed with mouths wide open. The lizards were the only ones that fought.

"Then from the western valley wall, another herd poured down, a great anaconda coiling beside a cluster of peccaries closely bunched together and squealing with terror, and behind all a swarm of hunters.

"Never before had I seen so many different breeds of spiders dwelling in amity with one another, and again I had the impression that these were intelligent, reasoning beings hunting together for the good of the many, and as far above the ordinary spider as the Anglo-Saxon is above the Australian Bushman.

"Now we were gathered in a cluster about the stone huts, hunters and hunted, a motley crew herded from all points of the compass over a twenty-mile radius, and the spiders set up a vast clacking of mandibles and emitted little hungry yearning cries.

"In answer, I heard thuds on the low roofs as the trap-doors fell back, and from each structure crawled a creature that dwarfed our captors into insignificance. It was a disgusting, heart-stopping sight, and our stomachs retched as we saw eight enormous spiders, each the size of a horse. But it was not their incredible size and filthiness, nor their bloated bodies which betokened an unthinkable age, that so horrified our souls! It was the look of an incredible, superhuman knowledge within their eyes, a knowledge not of this earth or era, a look as they saw us that might shine in the eyes of Lucifer, conscious of a kingdom or a *world* that had been gained, ruled and lost! And I knew that they looked upon us as an upstart race, born to serve, that had by a freakish accident turned the tables on our masters.

"This, I say, I read in their eyes, but my memory may be colored by the things I later *knew*.

"The monsters pounced down, selecting the choicest foods before them. One seized the carcass of a deer and bore it to the roof-top, mumbling down its juices, which would soon leave it a dry mummified husk of bones and hide. Another selected a large peccary or wild pig, and a third chose a savage lizard that killed three of the black and silver guards before it was stung into helplessness.

"A man was snatched from my side, shrieking as he was dragged to the roof-top and down into the building, his cries cut short by the shutting of the trap.

"Then one took me by the side and I gave myself up for dead. I have read of men that have been caught by lions, clawed and bitten, but feel no pain till long after they have been rescued. So it was with me. I felt neither pain nor fear as I was borne to the roof as a mouse is carried by a cat, but only regret that I might have done so many things that now I should never live to do.

"The creature dropped me upon the stone roof and inspected my clothing, which seemed to puzzle it. Then with a talon, it felt of my skin, whose whiteness I do not doubt was unfamiliar. Daintily and with exceeding care, it sank its hollow fangs into my arm and commenced the drinking of my blood. I felt no pain, only a haze before my eyes and a giddiness as I fainted.

"UP FROM an unfathomable abyss of sleep I swam, cleaving my way to consciousness with mighty strokes. I opened my eyes and saw that I still lived.

"I was lying on the roof with the eight horrors around me. The sun was set like a jewel, upon a mountain top, nearly at the day's close. The valley was a shambles, covered with spiders gruesomely feasting.

"One seemed to be communicating with the others. He was the largest of all and appeared to be in power, so that later I dubbed him King. This was the one that had chosen me and had, curiously, not finished his meal.

"Now one at a time, each came up, placed its fangs upon my wounded arm and tasted of my blood. When all had done this, there was another silent colloquy, and finally at some mysterious signal, several of the guards in silver took me off the roof, half carrying, half dragging me to another building, into which I was dropped and the door closed down.

"The air inside was fresh and pure, ventilated through the cracks in the rude walls. A dim light that seeped in revealed that there were no furnishings in the room except a low dais in one corner, obviously built for one of the great spiders, and a runway that slanted from the floor to the roof door. The interior was swathed in webs, so thickly hung that it seemed a tapestry. I tore down part of this, to admit more light, but the sun sank below the mountains.

"I slept a dreamless sleep, upon the dais, getting what consolation I could from the thought that tomorrow was another day, and at any rate I was seeing things that had not been seen before.

4. INQUISITION

"I WOKE with a start. The light of morning poured down through the open trap, but as I was considering the advisability of climbing up the runway, a large body filled the opening and backed down like a cat descending a tree. Half-way down, the spider king reversed ends and came head first, sliding down the polished slide, worn smooth by many great bodies.

"I stood up, dizzy with the pain of my wounded arm, which had begun to fester overnight.

"The monster approached, took my arm in his mandibles and apparently observed that it was enormously swollen, for he shifted his hold and cleaned out the wound with a talon, afterward injecting something by means of his hollow mandibles. The pain lessened and in three days the swelling was gone and I was well on the road to recovery. After this natural antiseptic had commenced its work, my captor exuded a quantity of raw web material from one of his triple-jointed spinnerets, and placed the sticky mass upon my arm, where it dried and hardened.

"He then stared unblinking into my eyes for several minutes, and again I had the impression of a mighty intelligence in that loathsome carcass that wished to communicate with mine. Finding that I made no response, the king urged me toward the runway by shoves, and with his assistance I managed to reach the roof and looked around me.

"The day was fair. Not a living thing moved in the valley, except a few of the guards busy dragging away the skeleton of a sloth. None of my Indians were visible, but I guessed their fate. All had perished in the night, and I was the only survivor.

"The king carried me to water, his fangs gripped in my clothes, and I drank deeply, after which I was carried back to the hut, and dropped in like a sack of meal. About an hour later, the trap opened, and a live agouti dropped in, and the door fell.

"I wondered if I was supposed to eat the little rabbitlike animal, but I wasn't hungry enough for that, so I lay down upon the dais and nursed my throbbing arm, while my fellow prisoner hid under the runway and the morning dragged along to midday.

"The spider king appeared a second time and investigated my condition. When he saw that the wound was not so angrily inflamed, he eyed me gravely, with a sage air of pondering the case, for all the world like a little German doctor of my acquaintance. I almost expected to hear him say, 'Ach, dot is goot!'"

"Again he assisted me to climb the polished slide, and upon the roof I found the other monsters. My captor set me down, with a proud air of showing off a curiosity to an interested audience, and squatted down where he could look into my eyes.

"I observed that the entire eight were males and wondered whether there were others in the buildings. If so they must be frightful indeed, for the female spider is usually larger and more ferocious than her mate, and often uses him as food when other dainties run low in the larder.

"Engrossed with such thoughts, I failed to notice at first that objects around me were growing hazy and vague in outline. It was as though gauze curtains were being lowered between me and the spiders. They dimmed until I strained my eyes to see them, then another curtain descended and the world went dark.

"It seemed that inside my skull the brain began to itch (I can think of no better simile), as though a light tendril of cobweb had been laid across it. Cautiously searching, the feeler groped in the convolutions of my brain, an intangible finger tickling until my skin crawled and my hair rose. Occasionally it paused with a firm pressure, and at this I saw bright flecks in the dark and heard a crackling, like an electric current leaping a spark gap. Then suddenly, connections were established, my mind and the spider's were *en rapport* and my memory was probed and read like an open book by the spider king. I felt a great loss of

energy, as though my life forces were being sapped.

"Of what the king learned from me, I have a very slight knowledge. In the light of later discoveries, I suppose that he obtained very concise information about the outer world, but only fragments of scenes leaked to me through the gray fog that shrouded my brain.

"Once, I remember, I was reading in a picture-book, learning my alphabet under the guidance of an elder child. I had not seen or thought of that child before for years, but now her face with all its freckles was as clear before me as the book from which I read. Then the vision was wiped away and again the gray mist shut in. Next I was walking the crowded streets of a city. I recognized Times Square in New York, I paused to speak to a friend that approached me; the meeting had taken place long ago, but I wonder if you can understand this? While we were conversing, I entertained the most cannibalistic thoughts. Literally, I regretted that I had not sprung at his throat and devoured that man, and he was one of the best friends that a man has ever had. I could not conceive how I had missed such a wonderful opportunity. To roam for days in crowded cities, with wonderful food all about me and never to feast, when it could have been obtained so easily!

"Again the fog closed. I realized that those thoughts had been not mine, but the spider king's.

"I was reading in a library, reading of people. Other people walked by me, sat beside me, brought me books. Such a wealth of delicious food,—in the outer world! Come! I shall go there! Never again shall I look with jaded eye upon my neighbor. He is sweet, he is dainty, he is nutritious, there is a peculiar savor about him that no other animal possesses! To the hunting grounds then, where there is meat enough for all!

"But what do I say and think? All is a lie! There are no people, no libraries, no books. There is nothing but a vast sea of clouds, of spiraling vapors, in which I float, a being smaller than the atom! There is a sound of many singing, a low and melancholy chant. If I can understand the words, I shall be free. Hush! Let me listen closer. Now the song is nearer, a wild unearthly chant, and now the voices strengthen and now the words are clear! And now I *see* a vast concourse of people, with skins the hue of brass, and they float from out the mists, while outstretched are pleading hands, hands of men, and chubby baby hands, beautiful well-kept hands of young and lovely women, and wrinkled, sallow hands of the very old! Hands that point me out, as I float lost in eddying vapors, hands that clench in anger, hands that plead and entreat in a language of their own, while their owners sing words quite different. All the universe seems a tangled knot of hands that twist and twine! Oh God! And all the voices sing in tones of dolor and of wo:

"All the suns are impotent to succor us,
In a vast dungeon barred with ever-shafting rain;
When a silent people of spiders infamous
Have come to weave their filaments upon our brain.

"But the knotted hands and fingers, as they squirm and tangle, command with many voices: 'Avenge us! Avenge us!! Vengeance!!!' And as I swear that I will, I break through the clinging mists and find myself upon the stone roof in the city of spiders!

"With a start, I realized that the last vision had been given to me *alone*. The spider king had no inkling of my command, or of my ac-

ceptance! How did I know this? I can not tell. I only knew with surety, that I possessed *one* secret from my jailers.

"IT WAS dusk again. From the western wall began to pour the hunters, driving their prey to the slaughtering grounds. The king carried me to the hut, and dropped me in. The trap closed.

"I had spent almost six hours in a trance, and I wondered what these beings had learned in that time, besides the scraps that I had retained. I felt empty, not only physically, but mentally, as though all my cherished knowledge had been brutally stolen and nothing had been put in its place. But I ran over my memories, and I seemed normal. It was a wild and uncanny experience.

"Outside was a pandemonium of shrieks and howls. The roar of some gigantic animal boomed close to my hut and the wall trembled. The little agouti crept out from under the runway and cuddled its head in my lap. It was shivering in an agony of terror. I stroked it, and it shuddered violently but nudged closer.

"A strident clicking like locusts outside, and then again the eery wail of a jaguar. It was filled with plaintive amazement, as though the beast could not credit what was happening to him. Ah, strike with your heavy paws, *El Tigre,* fight on, oh mighty one! The master of the jungle at last has met *his* master, and *El Tigre* roams the forest nevermore!

"A long hiss, and I knew that another of the valiant lizards was taking toll amongst his butchers, but there were no more hisses, so the sequel was plain.

"The dull roar of combat died away, leaving only isolated squeaks as a herd of wild pigs was brought down, somewhere in the valley. And then nothing, for when a spider dines, he does so quietly and without undue disturbance.

"A few minutes later, a large piece of meat was flung in. I did not inspect it too critically, but fell to at once. It was raw, of course, but I was ravenous, and a hungry man that has not eaten for nearly three days feels a surge of appetite for almost anything that seems fit for food. True, I had not killed the agouti, but I had been so feverish with my wound and the shock of my captivity that I had then no desire for food.

"I slept upon the dais, until a beam of moonlight struck through a chink and lay across my eyes. I began to worry about my chances for escape, until I could no longer rest. I went to the opening, and looked out. It was a beautiful moonlit night, the valley as far as I could see was bare. It brought a plan into my head and I tore down much of the clinging webs, until I had exposed the lower foundations of the hut. As I expected, the large boulders were filled in by small stones. I worried some of these loose, until I had opened a passageway large enough for a small man, but as I stooped to remove the last stone, the little agouti, seeing an opening to freedom, dashed past me and out upon the greensward. It had not gone ten feet from the hut, when a black and silver ghost was after it, and when it doubled to return, several more heaped themselves upon it.

"Very quietly, I replaced the stones and wedged them tight; there was no hope of escape at night for me. Well, one can always sleep if his nerves are iron, and finally I dozed off, a philosophic prisoner.

5. *THE FARTHER VISION*

"EACH morning, the spider king carried me to water, and each night I was fed. How I grew to loathe raw meat, and how I yearned

for green food, milk and salt! Some nights I dreamed about salt, white mountains of it, which I walked over on snowshoes and slid down upon toboggans and skis, every once in a while reaching down and scooping up great handfuls of it which I swallowed with relish. Often I awoke, to find myself licking the palms of my hands to get what saline content I might out of the perspiration and dreaming it was salt. Even now, I season my food with salt to an extent that makes it impossible for anyone else to enjoy the meal but myself. I grew thin, but my wound healed rapidly and I had no more visions as wild as the first one.

"The day after my abortive attempt to escape, my mind was probed again. In all the lucid intervals I remember, the only scenes I saw were of people. Cities that swarmed like hives, villages of people, and little isolated houses and cottages. How easy to storm one of those cottages, so far from any neighbor! How easy for that horde to conquer a small village and, flushed with victory, to advance upon a city, with all the spiders in the country flocking to our standard! Perhaps even to wipe the continent clean of Man, leaving this valley and establishing a rule elsewhere!

"And the night after *that* unconscious revelation, I began to suspect. I had just come from an interview with the king. As I satisfied my hunger, I tried to imagine the reasons that led him to learn of the outer world and to give me in turn glimpses of the past. For I had learned strange things, which shall be revealed in their place. Why had he sampled my blood? Had they relished the flavor, so different from the natives, and were reserving me for an especial tidbit, *or as a guide to places where more of my kind might be found?*

"Now I come to a point where I must take care not to strain your credulity to its limit, for I have things to tell that have made me a pariah in the scientific world. I am the butt for the most idiotic and asinine jokes, because I have told what I saw, bald narrative, with no fancy trimming of mine to make it more acceptable.

"And this is the story of Man's rise and fall. The story of the first reasoning being upon earth, the account of his inglorious servitude and the miraculous freak that saved you and me today from being hewers of wood and drawers of water to an insect!

"I put my separate visions into short accounts as each was given to me, for each vision holds within it a fact, as each nut a kernel, and if I made a connected story of the whole, it would be more incoherent than in the original form. There are blanks, but use your imagination to fill them; there may be faults of memory but there is much that tallies with the facts we know.

"Upon the third day of my imprisonment, the king held communion with me alone, the other spiders of his species remaining in their huts. Apparently having learned from me all that he wished to know or all that I could tell him, he opened a door for me to read the past.

"In all the scenes which follow, a word of explanation is necessary. I was granted to peep into the past, it is true, but there were bounds over which I might not trespass. Often the gray mists closed between me and some enthralling picture that I longed desperately to see more of. I participated, by proxy, in battles and was wounded, but never felt pain. I was present at scenes of the most frightful carnage, when the screams and groans of the dying and the howls of the victors must have pro-

duced a deafening din, but I heard no sounds.

"Is it that the mind can not hold the memory of pain? I think so. Hark back if you will, to the time when you suffered with a sprained ankle, a broken bone or a toothache. You remember that you suffered, but the pain in all its varying degrees you can not call back to say, 'At such a moment I felt *these* sensations.'

"But in regard to sounds, I believe that the sense of hearing in spiders is slight, and I doubt that these had ever possessed it at all.

"It seemed as though I was closeted within a small compartment. I watched a magic panorama that unreeled before my eyes, as a motion picture operator might observe the screen from his projection booth. Then the reel would end, the lights fade and all my world became a whirling fog.

"These, then, are the discoveries that I made and the facts that I learned from them, as I beheld the most marvelous drama that it has ever been given a man to witness.

"I STOOD by the shore of a stagnant lake, which was covered with a thick slimy growth that undulated with oily ripples, as though some great animal moved beneath it, for there was no wind. To my right, the ground was carpeted with a lush growth of coarse vegetation over which danced a maze of insects. I saw dragonflies whose gauzy wings would measure several feet from tip to tip, whirl in mimic battle. A procession of gigantic ants near-sightedly wove their tortuous path among the thick clumps of mushrooms that studded the fern-forest like varicolored jewels embedded in dark green plush.

"Above me a dome of clouds was spread, that marched from left to right, drizzling a fine mist as they passed. No sun or moon was visible, but a soft lambent light shone through the clouds, diffused by the mist, so that the landscape was well illuminated.

"A multitude of living creatures swarmed in the skies, but as far as I could see there moved no mammalian life as we know it. A thing that I took for a vulture hovering high, dropped and became on closer inspection a huge wasp, that darted down into the ferns and rose with a kicking insect in its claws, darting swiftly across the lake. All life seemed to be represented by insects!

"It seemed as though I was called, although I heard no sound. I turned, to behold a like scene to that I had been watching. A stone pier projected out above the slimy liquid. From this platform a path wound into the shrubbery. This I expectantly watched, waiting for the one who had signaled to come in sight. Presently the ferns swayed and a huge bulk lumbered down to the pier.

"It was an immense spider, similar in size to the king, but it was a dull brown and hairless, its skin as thick and tough as sole-leather and oozing moisture. I was not surprized by the sight, for I had expected this, and I knew with the calm acceptance of the most amazing facts that we meet only in dreams, that *I* was also a spider, or at least looking through the eyes of one for a time.

"I understood, or rather my control understood (for this took place long, long ago), that I was to follow, and we two started along the path. Once we stopped to allow an army of ants, similar to driver ants, to cross our route. We were unseen by them, so that they passed on devouring everything that lay before them and leaving a wide swath of desolation, bare of any living thing. A short time after this, we came on a wide plain that hummed with activity. Spiders of all types were there, hust-

ling to and fro, herding beasts before them in small bands, toward a large stockade that was built of stone. One of these bands had stopped, and a hubbub was taking place. As we neared this commotion, I saw that these beasts were sometimes standing erect and sometimes upon all fours, and coming closer still, I beheld that their skins were white and that they were *men!*

"Men, I say, but not as men are now. Their faces were dull and stupid, their bodies were grossly fat, and like sheep they crowded together for mutual protection. A very few were thin and wiry, more energetic than the others and more daring. These few were leaving their own bands and were clustering about the scene of trouble, only to be forced back by a guard of small spiders like the black and silver fellows, but these guards were almost hairless, having only the yellow crest of fur that denoted their rank. There were many of the rulers, packed into a knot which disentegrated as I came up, and I saw that the center of the disturbance was a man.

"Quickly the situation was explained to me, and I gathered that the slave had killed a spider. At my order, he was seized; and we returned to the lake, followed by most of the spiders and all of the men.

"He was forced to walk out upon the stone pier, and as he did so the surface of the liquid began to eddy fiercely. He came nearer and the slime rose and lapped the surface of the pier. Then he turned to run back, but already the mucilaginous liquid had him thickly by the feet. Slowly it crawled up his knees, his thighs and chest, while his mouth gasped wide for air, or with a cry that I could not hear. Then the sticky slime retreated into the lake and with it went the slave.

"Thus were offenders against the spider's law punished for an object lesson to the rest!

"The mob trooped back into the forest, and as I marched I pondered upon my surroundings. This was clearly a younger world than mine.

"An inner voice began to explain that this was a past unthinkably remote, a period of time when the equator and the temperate zones were still in a state of flux, when the equator was one roaring belt of volcanoes that belched lava and ashes into the hissing seas that rose in steam to obscure half the world in clouds. Countless eons would yet elapse before Atlantis and its sister-continent, Mu, would be raised from the oceans to breed a civilization upon each and then to sink again, the one beneath the blue waters of the Pacific and the other in the ocean which bears its name!

"But while the rest of the world was unfit for life, at the tropical polar countries the earth was cool enough to support vegetation in abundance, and where vegetation is, creatures will be found to live upon it.

"Here, as the different species commenced the race for supremacy, the insects forged ahead. The spiders, being the most intelligent and, save man, the most savage, had become the dominant reasoning beings of the globe. Man, arising later, was bred for food, and his spirit broken. But now and again one rose and struck back with the results I had seen.

"The voice died away, and as I marched I thought that it was something, after all, that a man dared to rebel. At any rate he was not fully conquered, and at this thought, it seemed as though I had learned my lesson from the episode, the misty clouds lowered and shrouded me in gray, and with a great roaring in my ears I passed from that era.

"I STOOD upon a mountain that overlooked a dreadful chasm. A fierce gale was sweeping along the heights and there were no clouds in the sky. Around me were grouped several of the rulers, shivering in the wind, their hides but little protection against the cold. The air was no longer warm and sticky and I knew that we were seeking a warmer climate.

"To my left, at the foot of the mountain, there was a plain that was swarming with the beastmen, all converging toward the ravine, with a multitude of spiders herding them on.

"Thus far we had come unhindered on our march from the cooling pole, but a mountain range across our path had barred our progress until we had discovered a way to pass through. On the other side of the range dwelt a nation of men that had never known the spiders' rule, tall and slim and of noble aspect. A budding civilization that we obliterated from existence. This nation was formed of many small cities, built of stone and wood and walled in for protection against the beasts and other men, more savage than beasts as they are at this day. They probably had some commerce with one another, some trade, some slight banding together against a common foe, but we spiders learned little of their life, for we smashed that nation and fed upon its people. But I anticipate.

"There was fighting in the chasm. A small troop of brass-hued men armed with spears and slings were bitterly contesting the advance of our armies. The pass was glutted with bodies forced on by the pressure of the masses behind, who in turn were forced on by the spiders. Timid and weak as were our slaves, by their very numbers they were a power to reckon with, and though they feared the men that held the pass, they dreaded the spiders more. Gradually they were winning through.

"From our height we could see that the brass-faced defenders were striking weaker blows. They were whittling away the head of the column still, but for every man that fell, two sprang into his place. There were dead in that crowd that had been slain at the beginning of the battle and were standing erect in the press, heads idiotically lolling from side to side, unable to fall!

"We moved along the mountainside, keeping the fighting beneath us. The ravine began to widen and our enemy had a greater front to cover, giving our beastmen an advantage which they speedily took.

"Now came a hungry horde of spiders, swooping past me down the mountain, that flung themselves upon the weary defenders of the pass, and over their bodies the beastmen rushed in mad scramble from the monsters that crowded them on.

"My band followed down the mountain wall and came finally to the new land of promise. Beyond the entrance to the pass, a walled city stood, gates barred and parapets manned with warriors that pelted our masses with stones and sleeting flights of arrows.

"But while the clumsy slaves scattered on the plain, we spiders with grim resolve scaled the walls, which offered no barrier to our taloned limbs. The brass-hued men fought bravely, but we mastered them and the city was ours.

"About a mile away, another city was beleaguered, and as the spiders rose along the wall, smoke began to rise from the huts within, in ever-increasing abundance. The people in despair had fired their homes, in sad preference for the fiery death to the worse fate that awaited them. The grass-thatched roofs made a roaring

hell of the city and the spiders were driven back.

"Now farther upon the plain, another pillar of smoke began to rise, and then a third, until all the cities had followed the example set by their brave countrymen, and as a nation the brass-hued race perished in the ruins of their homes.

"So it was that sorrow crossed the mountains, and there was weeping and wailing in the land.

"I STOOD again before the spider king, through whose memory I had searched the past, as through mine he had explored the present. The blood began to circulate through my numbed limbs, prickling like a thousand needles. I felt as though I had traveled far.

"My guards carried me to the dungeon, dropped in a shoulder of venison and left me alone. I fell upon the raw meat, wolfing it down in great mouthfuls, and as I ravenously satisfied my hunger I tried to imagine the reasons that led the king to learn of the outer world and to give me, in turn, glimpses of the past.

"Clearly, this was his method of relating his people's history, but why trouble himself at all? Why not slay me as he had the natives? I could only decide that I was being reserved for a guide to the outer world! They had relished the taste of my blood!

"On pondering over the visions, I recognized the chant of the brass-hued people to be a quotation from one of the poems of Baudelaire, but in the age when those beings fought the spiders, unthinkable periods of time would yet elapse before men began to dream of rime. I eventually reached the conclusion that if I *had* seen a vision and made a promise, the impression that the pleading voices had desired to convey to me struck a chord in my subconscious mind that nearly equaled that eery verse, so that in semi-stupor I fancied they chanted in the words of the French poet. I still believe that my theory is correct, but I wonder often what they really *did* say? The vision was so very real!

"I decided that each episode took place in the life of a different spider, and by the clearness of each vision, it would seem to indicate that the spider king recalled the incidents in his various reincarnations, or that lacking the written word to preserve history, this race had developed the ability of storing facts in their brain cells that were passed from one generation to another as physical attributes sometimes are with men.

"In all of these glimpses, I saw as a spider; I thought as a spider; I looked upon men as beasts of burden, created for the well-being of the spider people, an unclean miserable race, but necessary for our slaves.

"Thus they lifted themselves to a dangerous pinnacle, upon a foundation of sand, by depending so much upon a lower race of beings for their own existence. History is full of such errors. For look you! Your slave revolts or dies, with nothing to lose and all to gain, and if he succeeds—where are the rulers then? If he fails, progress has stopped or has been delayed, but it is the overlords that bear the expense, not the slaves. They can but die, and a dead or crippled slave is not of much value!

"Steadily after the smashing of this polar race, the breed deteriorated, civilization came to a halt for ages and began to retrogress. This was the true dark age for mankind, the faint dim remembrance of which has persisted in the myth of the Garden of Eden and the driving forth of Adam and Eve, a primeval people, into the wilderness. All that saved the world today from being ruled by spiders, is the unknown cataclysm that caused the first Ice Age, when

the world grew cold and the glaciers ground down from the North. The spiders died in the cold, being a tropical race, and only those that could adapt themselves to the changing conditions, growing warm coats of hair and becoming smaller and more lively, continued to exist.

"Perhaps you can imagine the antiquity of this period of change when you realize that all fossil spiders or those preserved in amber, that have yet been found, are the *same* size as those we know today!

"As they became smaller, some of the larger types persisted as freaks —still the rulers, but gradually losing their hold on man. Here then follows the story of the Great Migration.

6. BEFORE THE CAVEMEN

"I WAS allowed to rest a day, without seeing the king, and the next morning I was brought forth and commenced the last series of visions, the first scene apparently taking place many years after the taking of the city.

"A slash of purple light cleft the vapory haze and it rolled back before me, as a curtain rises at a play. I was on the roof of the central tower in the city, the sun beating down with but little warmth. It had lost a third of its former size and brilliance.

"The spider through whose eyes I looked, moved nearer to the edge and stood staring out over the city. The roofs were covered with snow, a bank of heavy clouds was gathering to the left of the observatory, and the scene was dismal in the extreme. The palm trees that originally had appeared at the taking of the city were gone and in their places were gnarled, stunted willows, whose bare limbs clattered like a skeleton's arms in the wind.

"Below, a procession was forming. A new breed of spiders had arisen. Half the size of the conquerors, they were covered thickly with hair. Their faces, which were turned toward my tower as though in expectancy, portrayed the savageness of fiends. Scattered thinly amongst the multitude were larger spiders of the ancient type, either throwbacks or survivals of the original rulers.

"Here and there sat bands of men, lowbrowed, hairy and brutalized. To such had the human race retrogressed! There were beasts of burden (and these also were men) that tottered beneath their loads of coarse vegetation intended for their own sustenance on the march. For this was an emigration to seek a warmer climate, and the city was being deserted.

"Climbing up the sheer wall came a large spider, as large as myself, that stood beside me in silent communion of minds. I gathered the impression that all was ready and they waited only for me. I followed my friend into the street. My control shivered and I knew it was bitter cold. We took places at the head of the column and commenced the hegira. At the city gates we stopped and looked back for the last time.

"The clouds covered the sky, the city was drab and deserted; we must have been the last or nearly the last expedition to leave. A white flake floated by my eyes, the pinnacles of the tower were dull as lead: I swung into my stride, the slaves lurched on.

"Man and his Master were on the march! And over all the snow was gently falling.

"IT WAS night. Over my head the stars gleamed respendent. Countless eons had passed, for the sky showed familiar forms. The pole star was the one we have always known, but in a former vision it had not been Polaris!

"I was some form of sentry, for I was walking a regular beat around a natural valley, accompanied by a troop of guards. All along my path

slept the great spiders, who still wielded the whip of power.

"In the valley were penned a savage tribe of men, short, hairy and bandy-legged, whose language was composed mainly of signs and horrid grimaces.

"I knew that our control was slipping, for it was against these that I guarded my comrades' sleep. The day before, the slaves had arisen and fled to the forests, many escaping from the horde of small spiders that rulers had perished in the fight, and had pursued them. Several of the we decided to move again.

"This was the last watch. Soon the horizon flushed ruddy with the rising sun and the business of the day began.

"From the thickets came all that were left of the gigantic spiders. We allowed the guard to release the slaves, and after they had gathered their possessions we traveled along the sandy shore. The spiders kept to the rear as the men shambled along, heads swinging from side to side as they peered viciously for signs of game in the sand. Ice floes drifted in the billows, grinding against the cliffs that we were nearing.

"Suddenly the men sniffed like dogs as they caught a scent, and we saw great tracks in the sand. They started off in a wide circle that finally led us to the foot of a tremendous glacier, where our game turned to face us. It was a hairy mammoth, his tusks curving like hoops, the points a little below the eyes.

"The men surged about him throwing spears and stones, and a multitude of small spiders swarmed over him until the great beast was a heap of vermin and his sides ran blood. Like a falling mountain he crashed to earth, raining spiders that leaped for safety, and we rulers, careful as usual of ourselves, advanced to the feast.

"As from a distance we watched the smaller spiders feasting, and the slaves resting near the glacier cliff on the thin strip of beach that separated them from the sea, suddenly a lump of ice dropped, splintering, from the sky, and following with quick descent came others! Then between us and the men roared an avalanche of ice boulders, raising a barrier unclimbable.

"We dashed, scattering, to the land, and behind us the beach was black with spiders, pouring a mighty river, racing for life before the advancing glacier, grinding the rocks to powder beneath it as a fissure rent it along a mile-long front!

"And as we looked back, we saw that long quiet torrent of ice in motion at last, for as a shot or a whoop is sufficient to start an avalanche of snow in menacing charge and men frown upon one who whistles or sings beneath a snowy slope of the Alps, so the titanic thud of the mammoth's fall, the earth-shaking crash of his sudden death, had startled the glacier into nervous leap. And now, separated from the parent body of ice, the mighty cliff towered toppling toward the sea and moved, ponderously staggering like a drunken world, crowding the slaves and pounding thinner the ribbon.

"The men panted, so far behind us as we gained the outside rim, that they were cut off. Madly they tore back and forth along the ever-narrowing beach, some swimming in the icy water, some falling upon their spears in superstitious dread of the devils of the sea, whose fins cut the waves as they feasted on the bodies of our slaves. Then the glacier moved inevitably on, entered the water, and the face thundered down with a splash that sent a wave lapping against our feet.

"Titanic icebergs floated in the tossing sea, monuments to the last of

our slaves, that marked the resting place of the remnants of the brass-hued race.

"No more slaves! No more civilization for the spiders! Hereafter we would hunt our own food, fight our own battles, build our own shelters, becoming more savage and more tiny with the years, until we were tolerated parasites in the palaces of men! Our destiny was that we should clear the filth and pests from the homes of an upstart, minor, inferior race of men, but still that time was far in the future.

"Then followed many snapshots of the past, so that I followed in quick glimpses the fate of that wandering, deteriorating band of spiders whose ancestors had conquered a world.

"Driven by the ever-advancing cold, they traveled south, deserted always by bands that stayed behind while the main body kept on. Always it was the smallest that lagged behind, the fiercest, the ugliest, the least intelligent! It is their progeny that spins the webs in forest, farm and field and in the end comes to inherit the proudest edifices of humanity.

"As the years were left behind us, our numbers decreased, until from millions we had become thousands, our rulers could be numbered by hundreds. From time to time we met other bands, some with slaves, but most without. Often we fought with these, for the years had made such differences in the species that we could no longer understand our fellow invaders. We saw brutal tribes of men, armed with stone hatchets and clubs, who gave us a wide berth. These were not the descendants of the polar race, but had evolved separately. We saw others, yet to evolve, and great apes, semi-arboreal, that were beginning to learn the possibilities that lay in the human thumb for grasping tools.

"But we passed on, our numbers dwindling ever, skirted volcanoes that thundered at us and slew many, fought through the terrible storms of that time, smashed by the pitiless hail, buried by avalanches, and at last found peace, those that were left of us, in the primeval jungles, where no glaciers could ever reach; and here we made a home. We built houses with the aid of savages that roamed where we had determined to settle, and fed upon their bodies afterward. We established the rings of different species of spiders about our central community and about a hundred of our rulers, all that remained to carry on the race.

"And here in the heart of the steaming forests we dwelt, no more of our progeny being born, for our age was great, but as our numbers decreased by natural deaths and the years gave us an infernal cunning our ambition rose to the point where we had almost decided to move again. But what lay outside our home? That was the question which gave us pause. Should we again brave the crunching glaciers and the bellowing volcanoes?

"But if the glaciers had fought the volcanoes and had been destroyed, then perhaps there were men again. Not the tough and unsavory savages that our hunters sometimes brought in, but large, fat and toothsome light-colored brutes that we could again rear in herds!

"And perhaps with the new food would be found others of our race, so that with their strength and our cunning, centuries in development, we should win to undreamed-of heights, as under our crafty leadership our smaller spiders, less intelligent than their forebears, conquered for *us* a world!

"At the next glimpse, there were only sixty or seventy of the rulers, the males predominating; and as the years went on, this little band became

less until at my last vision I opened the trap of my hut and only seven of my fellows were to be seen on their roofs, as we watched a herd of animals gathered for the evening feast, among them being brown naked men and a peculiar white-faced man, covered with a strange hide, the like of which I had never seen before, and whom I intended to dine upon!

"I, Jabez Pentreat, looked out through the eyes of the spider king and saw *myself* standing as I remembered I had stood, days before, as I had waited for the great spiders to pounce down from the roofs, and at this unbelievable sight, the curtain of gauze shut down and I realized I was at the end of the road! This is the only proof I have that my story is true.

7. THE CITY IN THE SMOKE

"THREE days later, being fully cured of my wound, I was again brought from the prison. The spiders were waiting. The valley was acrawl with vermin, whose dry rustling filled the air with whispers. Yellow-headed guards surrounded the huts, gray devils mingled with the scarlet-barred insects, huge black leaping tarantulas were present in great numbers, but in all that crowd I saw not a single insect whose bite is not poisonous to man.

"The spider king in his silent communication made it understood to me that my life depended upon my ability to guide them to the nearest community of whites, and I consented readily. Who would not have done the same? I intended to lead them to the river and take my chances of escape there, knowing that they were as careful as cats about entering water, for although the king had promised me my life, I had but little faith in the promise.

"So on the eighth day of my captivity we set out to the conquering of an unsuspecting continent. I walked in the center of the huge rulers' formation. About us rustled an imposing troop of guards, and for miles on each side the forest was filled with our myrmidons, scattered far and wide.

"How I feasted on fruit, that day! As we passed the small brook at *tambo* number 10, I caught some small fish and ate them raw, and no epicure ever tasted anything more delicious than that meal was to me. The drums growled again that night, as I lay in the midst of the lightly sleeping horde, that quivered angrily at my slightest movement.

"It took me, urged on by the spiders, only seven days to cover the distance that I had taken ten to accomplish coming in.

"Toward night we began to hear the roar of the Caroni River as it struggled through a *raudal*, or rapid, on its way to the Orinoco.

"Suddenly, about a mile ahead, there burst out a pandemonium of frightful screams that I recognized as humans voicing inhuman terror. The great brutes scuttled on faster, so that I was hard put to keep my place. Clouds of smoke rolled up ahead of us from a campfire, and presently we broke out of the forest and saw the flames. A tribe of ugly natives were trapped by the river, where they had made camp in a clearing, building their fire on a sandy spot. Around them, the tall reedlike grass, shoulder-high to a tall man, waved and shuddered and bent low with the rush of the spider army.

"The men had been surrounded and held until the arrival of the king, and as we came up I recognized their paint and tribal marks to be those of the Guaharibo Indians, savage men who slay for the love of murder and who had roved from their home near the upper reaches of the Orinoco, searching for heads and loot.

"Many heads hung in the smoke, partly cured,—and several of them were *white!* At this sight, something turned to steel with me, and had it been possible to save them, I would not if I could.

"I said to the king, 'These are the first.' He understood my meaning if not my words, and gave the signal for the attack.

"A great wave of spiders broke over the savages, clicking their battle cry, leaping from one to another, darting through the smoke. Seized with the madness of slaughter, the spider king and his fellows, to whom this was a joy they had probably been long without, charged with the rest.

"In a second, I was forgotten and absolutely alone! Dazed by the marvel of it, I was yet not too blind to seize my opportunity. Quickly, yet with the utmost care, I crept toward the river where the log canoes were drawn up on the shore and pushed all off but one. Still the battle raged.

"As I put one foot inside the canoe, something gave me pause. Again I heard the despairing, pleading cries of the brass-faced people and saw those writhing hands that swore me to vengeance. Stealthily I crawled back to the fire, gathered an armful of resinous, light wood, and with a burning brand trailing behind me set the grass aflame as I ran to the canoe.

"I paddled upstream to where the forest joined the clearing and beached the canoe. The wind was blowing strongly downstream. With my torch, I lit stick after stick and hurled the flaming wood far out into the field. Then I drifted down and held my position in midstream and waited.

"The battle was almost to its inevitable end. The fire that I had first lit was burning stubbornly into the teeth of the wind, and now, fanned to fury, a fifteen-foot wall of flame came down with a whirring roar to meet it!

"The fighting stopped. Man and spider, both were doomed, and from both sides the fire closed in. I yelled in joy, howling crazy, broken curses. Strange how much it looked like a great city in the smoke, with flaming, sputtering sheets of fire that lapped its phantom walls! From that whirlwind of sparks came a vast sound of frying! I heard a bursting mutter like gigantic kernels of corn popping in an enormous pan. A wave of sooty smoke, redolent of burned flesh, rolled out over the river and set me blind and coughing. As I wiped my streaming eyes, a horrid *thing* staggered from the flames, little spikes of fire shooting from its fat and bloated body! Although his hair was burned away and his mandibles were gone, I recognized the spider king. He lurched nearer and I saw that he was blind, just as his charred legs snapped with his weight and he subsided into the river.

"The water boiled and hissed when he struck it. Once he rose, lashing feebly, and I beheld that his body was swarming with little fish that rent and tore pieces of flesh away. These were the savage little piranhas, the miniature fresh-water sharks that give short shrift to anything that falls within a school of them. Again he came to the surface, the water frothed a bloody foam and then the last of the monster sank, in tatters, into the Caroni!

"Not many of the others escaped; after the fire had swept into the forest I saw that the ground was black with charred bodies, that lay in tumbled heaps around the skeletons of the Guaharibos. By easy stages, I made my way to civilization, bearing a stupendous tale to my friends.

"I told them my story and said in

substance, 'While you have been wasting your time for hundreds of years, searching back through the ages; with pick and shovel scrabbling in the dust of forgotten empires; with arduous sifting of myths and legends to find some small fact; with titanic efforts of geological, biological and philological research to bring the past nearer, the link that could tell you all you wish to know—is hunting flies in the rafters of your own houses! Apply yourselves therefore to the means of wresting this secret from it, for you can learn both of this and other lands more than by your explorations.'

"They laughed as I expected they would," he concluded bitterly.

As he finished, we were passing into Waltham and we began locating our luggage, for we had only a few more miles to travel. Then as the train neared Boston, he resumed at the original cause of our discussion upon the word "hate" of uncertain usage.

"So while you feel repulsion," he began, "and a sickened disgust at the sight of a spider, it is because the hereditary, subconscious memory *knows* that these creatures were once your lords in another existence and it commands you to obliterate this loathsome, alien life from another age. When you crushed that barn spider under your foot, you unconsciously took revenge for uncounted eras of oppression, that has made such a mark on the human brain that forever and ever most men will sicken at the sight of a spider.

"You are repelled without understanding the reason for your dislike, but I—I *hate* them, for I know *what* they are—a fact which no other man alive is certain of.

"All spiders that I come in contact with now, are attracted to me. I enter a room, for instance: there is not the sign of a web about, my hostess would swear that the house is spotless, but if there *is* a spider it feels my presence somehow, and before I leave, I may find one perched upon my shoe, or near me, steadily gazing with its beady black eyes.

"I hate them, but I have not the fear, which you mistakenly call hatred. I am going to search for Carewe and *we* will search for that polar country where the brass-hued men lived, and may even find a frozen or fossil spider that will prove that I did not lie to my fellow scientists. But until that day, I tell my story to no more scoffers, nor should I have told you if I had not wished to see how a layman received the theory that all my contemporaries have rejected.

"What, Boston so soon?" he ejaculated as we pulled into the North Station. "I hope I have not bored you."

"Indeed, you have not, Mr. Pentreat," I answered, with a smile. "I wish you good fortune in your search." And I extended my hand.

"Thank you, I shall need it," he said gruffly, and wringing my hand, he stepped into the crowd and I saw my last of the man with the beady eyes.

I shall not include this in my novel, nor shall I change his version of affairs. It is an amazing theory at least, and if it were proved, it would cause havoc to cherished opinions, but if he goes to find his lost city in the North, he goes alone—for I read that Sir Adlington Carewe has disappeared into the jungles of Africa's West Coast, and as his experiments dealt with great apes and lunatics, I do not think he will be back.

Well, you have read the story. I give you fair warning that I don't believe it myself. His eyes were just a wee bit *too* bright!

The CREATURE OF MAN

by OSCAR COOK

"Slowly those outstretched arms curved upward and inward, raising the bound body toward the idol's breast."

THROUGHOUT the great palace of Tey Bee Yong, governor of a vast province in the interior of China, the atmosphere was heavy with tense expectancy, pregnant with a sense of troubled fear.

Within the palace itself, under the eyes of a stern, expressionless, toothless majordomo, the indoor servants quailed, answering by some subtle instinct his unspoken commands, moving about with that silent stealth, the combination of their nature and their fear.

In the outer courtyards the most menial of the servants—little better than slaves and less cared for and tended than pigs and fowls—scarce dared to breathe and only dared to express their dull, untutored thoughts in whispers.

From every window of the palace, which stood upon one of twin hills, myriad fantastic lamps gave forth their lights, winking like colored stars upon the houses that huddled in the plain beneath. From the crest of the sister hill on which was built the great Temple of Parenthood, a solitary, mighty light gleamed heavenward. It came from the huge lantern that burned day and night before the great carved ivory and golden altar, dedicated to the brooding spirit who ruled the destinies of childbirth.

The accomplished days were numbered. Hours, perhaps only minutes, now stood between the supreme moment, when the hopes of a people and the burning desires of Tey Bee Yong would be realized to the uttermost, or despair and cruel anger once again stalked the land. For the wife

of Tey Bee Yong was in the pangs of childbirth.

Tey Bee Yong, the omnipotent, governor of the mightiest and largest province in China, potentate over the lives and destinies of ten million people, possessor of a hundred wives and twice as many concubines, was still without a son.

This night——?

From the palace to the temple a steady stream of servants flowed, laden with offerings from the deep and those strange lands across the sea that basked in perpetual sunshine and torrential rains. Sharks' fins and birds' nests, cuttlefish and sea-slugs; the scented woods from vast and almost untrodden jungles, gave off their aromatic perfumes from a thousand joss-sticks that burned before and upon the ivory and golden altar. Sucking-pig and fowl and sweets, decked with fantastic frills and colored paints, were laid in great profusion before the weird effigy of the spirit-god, upon whose extended arms was placed the image of a naked man-child, carved from a solid block of age-old amber.

The temple courts were filled with priests whose shaven heads, bowed in almost ceaseless supplication, glistened like ivory balls in the glare of the great lantern. Naked were they all save for their baggy trousers; against the dull ivory of their skin their long, black, oiled pigtails gleamed like dark weals of wo—the stripes of a burdened people, symbols of an age-long superstition.

In the squalid houses on the plain, smoke from the open fires all but obscured the fitful light of flickering torch and candle. Round the fires huddled the almost soulless inmates, hungrily filling their half-starved bellies with a meager fare of sweet potatoes—for of rice there was none, since for the fifth year in succession the crop had failed. Even to them far removed, yet under the shadow of the palace, the air of tense expectancy and troubled fear had spread. One topic and one only passed their thin pinched lips. They spoke in the cracked, weak voice begotten of poverty and endless utter dejection.

Before the cheap painted wooden *pikongs* in each house the joss-sticks burned, adding their quota to the smoky, stuffy atmosphere; carved sweet potatoes, representing pigs and fowls, and dyed vermilion, blue and green, rested upon trays before the pictured image of the god.

"Oh, that a man-child would be born this night!" Such was the burden of the people's prayers. For with his birth the curse of famine would depart and plenty once again spread over the land. This was the superstition, the edict of the priests of the great temple on the hill. The blight of famine would continue and spread, year upon year—unless an heir was granted to the land to carry on the rule of Tey Bee Yong, the heaven-born lord, beloved of Confucius.

"Oh, that a man-child would be born this night!" As a whispering wind, as the swell of waters, as the distant tramp of feet, as a living, breathing, moving spirit the cry, though almost silent and nearly inarticulate, seemed to permeate the air—the cry of despair that yet expressed hope.

In a room hung with gold and black silken draperies, upon a multitude of cushions reclined Tey Bee Yong, outwardly impassive and calm. By his side was his opium pipe, which he raised to his lips, as frequently he filled its blackened bowl with tapering, nervous fingers, the long nails of which glistened in the lamplight like the talons of a bird of prey. His almond eyes were narrowed to the merest slits, his forehead was creased into thin, graven lines. Over his lower lip the two front teeth, large, yellow, and discolored, fell like two slabs of

ancient ivory. His thin lips were bloodless, his ears abnormally large.

Thus he waited—waited like the very meanest of his people for the coming of the child that meant so much. But his anxiety was only for his pride, not for the hungry populace.

Outside, the sound of feet coming along a corridor reached his ears. Just for a moment his impassiveness gave way and he raised himself upon his cushions. Then as the steps passed by he sank back, his fingers hungrily groping for his pipe. He raised it to his mouth, unfilled, then put it down and struck upon a gong that stood by his side.

The door opened in due course and the majordomo stood bowing before him.

"Chow Lim," the words were soulless, expressionless, "bring me a bowl of bird's nest soup and——" Tey Bee Yong hesitated. In the silence Chow Lim waited. "And——" Again Tey Bee Yong paused. Though the world rocked, though his wife might die—still he could not, would not, show the tension that was his. Immemorial custom barred the way.

Still Chow Lim waited, his body bent in deep obeisance, his hands crossed over his breast.

A lantern by an open window, lit by twenty candles, flickered, guttered and went out. A streak of darkness stretched across the room and in its passage rested on Tey Bee Yong's face.

"And——"

A moaning cry of pain came stealing through the window from the courtyard below, followed by an infant wail.

With blazing eyes and outstretched finger pointing to the window, Tey Bee Yong spoke.

"Go! And cast her in the well of eels who thus has dared to break my rest, and throw her spawn into the river that its blighted spirit may not dwell in nearness to my house. Go!"

Chow Lim bowed lower and departed.

Through a maze of passages he walked with rapid, silent footsteps, that yet seemed weighted with the low fatalism of the East.

From out a small door in the palace he emerged, and guided by unusual sounds, crossed the courtyard and entered one of several squalid huts.

Inside was confusion and distress. Upon dirty matting on the floor a woman lay, with closed eyes and faintly moving breast. She was so thin and worn it seemed impossible that she could have given the breath of life to another than herself. In the arms of a woman near by, a newborn babe, a man-child, was nestling. Over the smoking fire its father stirred some black, insipid gruel made from yams and sweet potatoes. Two dogs, in a corner, were fighting over the peelings.

Just for an instant Chow Lim stood still as the squalor of the scene struck even his unimpassioned senses. Just for a second he wondered whether the woman was not dead—so faint her breathing, so still she lay. Just for an instant——

The child's wail rose above the snarling of the dogs. Chow Lim moved forward. Slowly, inevitably he drew near. Only three paces separated him from her who held the child. The mother opened her eyes in supplication—some instinct warned her of approaching harm—her lips moved, but speech was beyond her power. Over the fire the father crouched lower; his stirring ceased. With a moan he rolled to the ground; his body could endure no more, the blackness of a swoon and hunger enveloped him.

Close to the woman Chow Lim approached, his arms extended, his eyes and mien eloquent of command.

Over the tiny body his fingers crept. Then——

From the palace arose a long, despairing wail that stole out of the building, through the courtyard, down to the huddled houses on the plain. The great light streaming heavenward from the temple changed from its golden to a blood-red hue. The priests, on their knees before the altar, chanted a dirge of misery and wo.

Chow Lim stood still, hesitating. Then above the wail from the palace, louder than the temple dirge came the cry of many voices, a cry of fear. "The child is born, the child is born! But alas! it is no man-child, we must starve another year!"

In his room Tey Bee Yong waited for the confirmation of the cry which crept through the walls and reached his ears. Broken in two his opium pipe lay on the ground at his feet. Clenched were his hands till the knuckles shone like polished bone in the flickering light. Into his lower lip his ivory, slablike teeth were biting till blood fell drip by drip.

Not many rooms away, his wife lay dying, unheeded and alone, bereft of her serving women and midwives, who with the callousness of their race and smitten with the prevailing dread had left her in her very hour of need. At her cold breast a tiny form was vainly pressing. Into the frail weak arms it wriggled and there lay still, silent save for its puny whimper. Faint as an autumn ray of sunshine a smile flickered over the mother's face; then light as a spring shower, her tears fell. Slowly her lips moved as she whispered with her dying breath:

"Dear little daughter, thou art not wanted,
In this great China, this land of much wo,
It were far better that Death now should claim thee,
Than thou shouldst live the world's griefs to know.

"Dear little daughter, accursed for thy womanhood,
Born to be sold, or exchanged, or just bartered,
A slave and a drudge till the end of thy days,
Creature of man and his——"

The whisper ceased. The joss-sticks smoldered, then died out. The lamps flickered with uncertain light.

In the hut in the courtyard Chow Lim's fingers fastened on the tiny body, and as they did so he formed a great resolve. Gently he took possession of the child. Then with a ghost of a smile at the weeping mother he passed out. Back through the maze of passages he traveled up to the room where the dead woman lay. Silently, almost secretly, he entered. With the ensuing draft from the opening door the lamps went out. Darkness and a child's whimper.

Quickly he crossed to Tey Bee Yong's wife, and in her arms placed the man-child. Quickly he seized the baby daughter, and placed his hand over its mouth, then in the darkness re-crossed the floor. His footsteps hurried out in the passage with an unaccustomed haste. Once again he reached the courtyard, entered the hut and put down his burden. He spoke no word, but with a gesture, unmistakable in its authority, commanded complete silence. Then he departed.

Slowly he retraced his steps, wondering as he walked what strange freak of fancy, what curious twist of psychology, had been the cause of his unprecedented action.

Just for a moment fear seized him, fear at his temerity in pitting his strength against the god, fear at his audacity in so attempting to deceive Tey Bee Yong. As he reached the door where the dead woman lay, he trembled from head to foot and a cold sweat broke out over him. He had dared the gods, defied their decree! He was deliberately about to lie to Tey Bee Yong, the omnipotent! Irresolute he stood, hesitating to enter.

Why had he done this thing? Why? To his unspoken thoughts no answer came, but before his eyes appeared the picture of his own erst-

while wife, whose golden lilies* were far-famed, whose curved vermilion lips his own had so often kissed, whose head of shiny well-oiled hair had lain upon his breast, whose cheeks so lightly brushed with scented pearl-dust had nestled near his own, lying dead and dishonored, killed by the passion and cruelty of his master, Tey Bee Yong.

The beating of a gong broke in upon his troubled thoughts. The imperious sound awakened in him the necessity for action; gave him the courage to play his part. Quickly he entered the room, picked up the child, then, calm and collected, impassive as of old, hastened to obey the summons.

"My lord," the words were laden with respect.

From the contemplation of his opium pipe Tey Bee Yong looked up to find Chow Lim bowing before him, and in his arms a child.

"Cast that most accursed spawn, that female toad into the river. And she who gave it birth, accursed and hated by the gods, drive forth from out my gates with ignominy. Burn on her forehead the brand of shame, for she sold herself for food and raiment, lived for a year in wealth and comfort, then failed to give her lord a man-child. Go!"

"My lord." Deeply Chow Lim made his obeisance, then stood erect. Thus for a brief moment he faced Tey Bee Yong, then the child's whimper broke the silence.

"Son of an evil mother!" cried Tey Bee Yong as he raised himself from his cushions. "Dost dare to pause upon my command? Go, ere my wrath burst bounds. Go!"

"My lord, most honorable master," began Chow Lim, and his voice, though humble, held some quality of compulsion. "Thy servant for many years craves thy pardon for his disobedience, yet is he emboldened thus to dare thy wrath, for those whose voices reached thine ears a little while ago, did lie. They spoke of what they knew not but only of their fears. See, lord, what I thy humble slave and majordomo bring to thee. For this, and this alone, dare I delay in execution of thine honor's will."

As he paused for breath, Chow Lim stretched out his arms, showing the child to Tey Bee Yong.

"Oh, heaven-born master, gracious lord, behold the great god of the mighty temple has answered thy prayer. See, into thy arms I place the longed-for man-child."

A slow silence crept over the room as Tey Bee Yong with the child in his arms rocked slowly on his feet. A whimper broke the silence. It startled Tey Bee Yong. Into the arms of Chow Lim he thrust the child, then with a sudden thought asked:

"And she who bore this child, this son of mine, this infant of the god most blessed, what of her? Give to her all attention, double the number of her serving women, for I will raise her to my side and take her to my own most intimate habitation. Hasten, Chow Lim, and do my bidding; prepare her for my visit, for I would speak with her. Go! And for thyself there shall also be rewards."

Chow Lim bowed low.

"My lord, though the god has given thee a son, in the giving hath he claimed the mother, for Moi Kam Moi, thine honor's latest and best-beloved wife, is dead. Yet shall the child live and so delight thine eyes. Thus shall he perpetuate the heaven-born's fame and so give plenty to this stricken land."

He bowed again and silently departed. For fully a minute Tey Bee Yong stood still, motionless as an ivory image. Then he struck the gong. Chow Lim himself answered the call.

"Bring me another pipe," Tey Bee Yong's voice was calm and expressionless, "for this of evil workman-

* bound-up feet.

ship is broken in two. And send Kiu San Kiu to me. My eyes would feast upon her sinuous form, my mouth taste her vermilion lips, my arms feel her soft body in their sweet embrace. Go!"

Far into the night Chow Lim was busy making arrangements for the care and tending and upbringing of the changeling child.

Over the land the news was spreading. In the months that followed, from East to West and North to South the fields were heavy and golden with the thick ears of ripening grain.

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SEVENTEEN years had passed since the birth of Tey Bee Yong's child —years of plenty for the populace. Never a breath of suspicion blew upon Chow Lim; not for an instant did Tey Bee Yong suspect; never a word was spoken by the inmates of the hovel.

Only in the palace and its precincts there grew up two children, who by some freak or fantasy of the god were in the end most strangely drawn together.

Yong Bee Tey—for so was the man-child named—was good to look upon. Tall and straight of limb, with open eyes and smiling countenance, he held his father's pride and such affection as was his. In all things was he indulged save one—his future marriage. On this one point his father was the stern, unbending autocrat. For there was one, the pale-faced limping daughter of a far-off governor, whose province adjoined that of Tey Bee Yong, with whom he intended his son should wed; that with the union his ambition for aggrandizement might be fed and he redeem his pledge. For, as was the custom of the land, the children in infancy had been affianced by their parents' bond.

Across the sky dark clouds were scudding. Faster they came and thicker they grew, till in the west they banked one upon the other, then spread across the star-flecked sky. Out of the east a wind came roaring, then ceased with a startling suddenness. The clouds pressed lower and then broke, dragging the earth with torrential rain. Peal upon peal of mighty thunder; flash upon flash the lightning played.

But Tey Bee Yong's son, returning home from the hunt, heeded not the storm, for just before reaching the outer walls of the palace he would pass a tiny, disused gardener's hut. There he would find his heart's desire, his pearl beyond all price, his Ming Po Ming, whose peach-bloom cheeks were innocent of pearl-dust, whose lips pouted a natural redness richer than vermilion paint, whose sleek-black hair, untouched with oil, outvied that of other maidens, whose golden lilies were beyond compare.

As he approached he sang for the very lightness of his heart, while his pulse beat quicker at the thought of holding her soft form in his embrace. Just as he turned a bend in the path a vivid sheet of lightning lit up earth and sky. In its glare he beheld the hut and Ming Po Ming framed in its doorway.

For a moment his heart stood still and his blood seemed turned to water as he saw her flinch before the sudden glare. Then with a run and a bound he reached the hut, and she was in his arms.

"Ming Po, Ming Po, sweet flower of my heart," he murmured, "thou must not stand so at the door, when such a storm is raging; what should I do, sweet blossom, if the lightning struck thee down?"

For answer she nestled closer in his arms, then shyly whispered: "Ah! but I could not wait to feast my eyes upon my best beloved. If he be in the storm, shall not Ming Po then watch for his return? What is

a little rain, a little thunder and a little glare compared to her great love?"

"Ming Po, beloved!" And once again his lips met hers and all the world was lost to them. Thus did they stand, oblivious of the storm without, murmuring such words as only lovers know.

But in a world of stern reality such moments, though they hold an age, must pass, nor is their power supreme enough to triumph over fear and dread, those deep-born instincts of the serf and poor. And so——.

There came a clap of thunder, louder than the rest, that startled Ming Po and by its seeming unexpectedness awoke her quiescent fears. Slowly she disentangled herself from Yong Bee's embrace; then with a pensive gesture smoothed out the wrinkles of her coat and trousers, the while he watched, wondering yet conscious of some forceful intrusion.

Over the room a silence crept as the storm with unearthly suddenness ceased. Through cracks in the walls and holes in the roof a chill wind found its way. Ming Po shuddered —was it from cold or fear?—and slowly her tears fell.

"Ming Po!" The words were wrung from Yong Bee. "Ming Po!" and he moved toward her, but with upraised hand she motioned him away.

Wondering, he obeyed the gesture and waited.

"Beloved, king of my heart, I am afraid. You are the governor's son; I—I am only the daughter of his meanest servant."

"Yet the jewel of my life," Yong Bee could not restrain the words, nor the fervent love and longing in their tone.

Through her tears Ming Po smiled a silent answer and then continued: "I am afraid and sore distressed. Only today I heard Chow Lim relate how that thy father had decreed that thy marriage must take place before the waning of two moons. If so, if so——"

Tears choked her voice. Her sorrow broke down Yong Bee's good intents and once again he found his arms around her, and hot passionate words of love fell from his lips.

"Flower of my heart, most priceless jewel in all the world, thou must not weep so. Dry thy poor tears; nor ever think that I can cease to love thee, nor that my father's will can force me to a marriage with that limping, pale-faced daughter from the North."

"But of Chow Lim I am afraid."

"Chow Lim! My best beloved fearful of a servant? Nay, nay, whence comes thy fear?"

"I do not know—I can not say, and yet—he seems to fill me with a fear. It is as if he served a purpose of his own; as if behind his face of masklike blankness there lay a knowledge all his own. Always I feel his eyes upon me. He seems to see what others do not notice. His thin lips droop with a cruel twisted smile whenever he meets me. Only today he stopped me as I came to meet thee; pinched my arm and tweaked my chin, then with a dart his fingers reached my neck. He felt the amber necklace thou didst give me, pulled it from my neck and then—was gone."

The last two words, faint as a whisper, just reached Yong Bee. Just for a moment Ming Po's glance, in which fear and love were struggling for the mastery, met his gaze, then over her shining almond eyes the heavy lids fell and unconscious she lay in his arms.

Slowly the fear that was hers stole into his brain; slowly he realized the danger that confronted them. Their secret was out! Chow Lim held them in the hollow of his hand; his power was second only to his father's. Some even said he ruled the land, for since the day of Yong Bee's birth,

his honor and power had steadily grown in silent, subtle ways, till he alone held the ear of Tey Bee Yong who, sodden with opium and degenerate with excessive lusts, leant more and more upon his strength.

Into the pale face of Ming Po, Yong Bee looked lovingly. No paint nor pearl-dust marred her beauty. Light as thistledown she lay in his arms; the scarlet of her 'golden lilies' the only touch of color in her clothes. And as he looked he marveled at her features. There was no beauty in the land like hers. Whence came such perfectness? How was such loveliness born of menial parentage? Surely the god of childbirth moved in strange and subtle ways.

"Chow Lim!" In her swoon Ming Po was muttering, murmuring the words of her great fear.

What was the knowledge that he held locked in the fastness of his mind? What was the purpose that he served—the purpose all his own? Yong Bee wondered, for he did not know the story of Chow Lim's wife.

Then once again the thunder rolled and the vivid lightning forked the sky. Once again the rain poured down in unaccustomed fury. The frail shelter of the disused hut proved but little protection from the storm. Yet they must wait, for between them and the palace stretched a river, now running in spate, the roar of whose waters almost equaled that of the thunder.

Gradually Ming Po recovered from her swoon, and though cold and still fearful, yet found some warmth and comfort in Yong Bee's arms.

In the great palace on the hill Chow Lim was waiting. The hour of his destiny was approaching; his mind seemed akin to the fury of the storm. Each night during seventeen years his prayer as he lit the *pikongs* had been the same. Each night ere troubled sleep had touched his eyes his vision had never changed—the vision of his wife cold in death and dishonor and shame. And now——

The beating of a gong broke in upon his revery. Silently, impassively, as of old he obeyed the summons and stood bowing low before Tey Bee Yong.

"Chow Lim." Tey Bee's voice had lost its strength and vigor. In the large room it sounded cracked and husky. Between words its owner's breath wheezed in gusty puffs. One ivory slablike tooth was missing from the now loosely hanging lower lip. The almond eyes were almost lost in heavy rolls of fat that encased the deep caverns of their sunken sockets. The creases on his forehead were graven deeper than of old. Only the long fingernails glistened in the lamplight as of yore.

"Chow Lim."

"My lord," Chow Lim was almost servile in his complete obeisance.

"Where is my son?"

"Thy honor's son?"

"Yea, my son. Fully two hours have I, Tey Bee Yong, the blessed of Confucius, governor omnipotent, been waiting thus, and yet he does not come. I whose commands have never yet been broken, whose slightest wish is weighted with the fear of death, I, lord of the lives of all my subjects, I have waited! Only my love has kept my wrath from bursting. Tell me, Chow Lim, where is my son? Tell me, I say, or shall thy home be blasted?"

Through the great room the cracked voice echoed, for it held an intensity of emotion, of love and anger and wounded pride, that would not be denied. Just for a moment before that fateful figure of omnipotence Chow Lim wavered in his resolve; just for a moment his courage failed. Then once again the vision came before his eyes, and slowly he spoke each word with stedfast calm.

"My lord, the offspring of my honored master, is—how should I know, my lord? I do not spy upon the movements of thy honor's honored child. It is not meet that I—and yet——"

"Spawn of a filthy mother, whose shameful wife I cast from out this land, beware! If thou knowest aught, then speak; if not then close thy mouth, else will I send thee back whence thou camest."

Tey Bee's wrath had burst its bounds. In his unbridled rage he thus taunted Chow Lim with those sad happenings of the bygone years. Careless of all and cruel in the belief of his omnipotence he thus set fuel to the fire of Chow Lim's yet wavering thoughts. Yet not an eyelid quivered, not a muscle twitched to betray the storm of hate within his heart as Chow Lim, in answer, bowed low his head, extending outward both his palms in token of servitude and submission.

"Oh, heaven-born prince, beloved of Confucius, thy servant hears. Thy words, thy slightest wish, as ever, are his commands. Hear me, oh lord, for I would speak the truth. Yet if my words should anger thee, I crave thee withhold thy wrath from me, thy humble slave; remember, oh honored master, the years of my untiring service."

Chow Lim ceased and silence filled the room. It was as if these two, the governor and the servant, fought a duel; and in the end the servant won, for with a heavy sigh Tey Bee sank back among the cushions from which he had risen and with a weary gesture of his hand signified consent.

"My lord," Chow Lim began, "how better can thy servant break the news to thee than by a question? Whom does the dove seek among the branches of the trees when spring is in the air? The mighty dragon, symbol of thine honored race, prowling in unpeopled lands when the new buds are blossoming upon the trees, whom does he seek, oh master? The snake, shed of his year-old skin and conscious of his——"

"Enough!" The cry was wrung from Tey Bee Yong, who with blazing eyes and quivering lips sat upright among his cushions. "Enough! Thou meanest——?"

"That youth will serve its instinct and find a mate of its own choosing. My lord, 'tis ever so. Thou mayest command; thy will may be enforced; yet in the heart of youth there lies a depth unplumbed. And so I fear——"

Skilfully now in turn, Chow Lim added fuel to the fire of his master's wrath and with consummate cleverness played on his curiosity.

He paused and then repeated, "And so I fear that thine honor's child may prove indeed his likeness to his sire and so possess a will immovable. Love is the life of youth. 'Tis meat and drink to those that are ahungered and athirst. It knows no stooping, counts not its condescension; heeds but the lips and eyes, nor thinks of birth or rank, and I am afraid——"

"Of what? What dost thou fear? What wouldst convey with thy insinuations?"

Once again Chow Lim extended his arms with the palms of his hands uppermost ere he continued.

"That the insidious disease called love, which saps the strength of those who do contract it, which enters their blood and breeds a curious madness that warps their views and so corrupts their wills that they acquire a stubbornness beyond all reason, so that they do forget the tenets of their land and faith and the true teaching of the great Confucius that youth should reverence age and bow before its will, may seize thy honor's offspring in its grasp and so bring desolation on this land."

"Thou liest." The words were a very snarl, a blend of pain and wrath. "Thou liest. No child of mine, while I yet live, shall mate save under my commands, nor wed the one save whom I choose. And I have chosen. In the North is one affianced from birth. Love! I do not know its meaning. Figure and form that do delight the eyes, a body that can bear a son—such do I ask and such will I command. Such can I find among the great ones of the land. There is no will in all the land save mine." Tey Bee, exhausted by the vehemence of his spirit, fell back among his cushions, glaring at Chow Lim with blazing eyes.

"And yet——" Reluctance and grief and fear were in the pause, but Tey Bee knew not that they were simulated.

The storm had passed. Through the window gleamed the moon. In the hut by the river it lighted on Ming Po's face. It gave to Chow Lim the inspiration of his life.

"My lord, behold the moon. Under its silvery light, beneath the magic of its spell, the love disease grows strongest, for lovers best care to meet when the great orb is highest in the sky. 'Tis then the madness grips them and lips meet lips. 'Tis then that duty, honor, filial piety are shed and only naked, longing souls remain. Near to the river whose roaring waters can now be heard, yet which will soon subside, there stands a hut, disused and old. There, of a night, thy servant, lord, hath seen two lovers meet. Each month when the moon was full they met. Thy slave paid them no heed—thy pigs and fowls find mates—until——"

Chow Lim paused once again to watch the tortured face of Tey Bee Yong. In very truth the hour was come. Then he continued with relentless calm.

"Until this night thy servant recognized a voice that drove the blood from out his veins—the voice of thine honor's child."

From nerveless fingers Tey Bee's opium pipe fell to the ground to break in two—just as his pipe had broken of yore. The great head nodded from side to side. The loosened, ivory, slablike tooth worked up and down the overhanging lower lip. The long-nailed fingers clawed his silken coat.

Slowly, with infinite effort, he opened his lips, but no sound came forth. Yet once again he tried. Faintly the whisper reached Chow Lim: "Water."

The latter crossed the room, filled a bowl, which he brought to his master. Deeply Tey Bee drank, then closed his eyes and waited. The years of excess had taken their toll; opium and lust now claimed their sway. Gone was omnipotence, might and power; only the husk of a man remained, to see life's dream fading.

"My lord," Chow Lim was speaking and his voice held now a note of pleading. "Yet trust thy servant, who serves but thee. All is not lost if I do act tonight, for I have found an antidote to this disease of love. Hark! even now the waters of the river are abating. Give me but leave to cross the river, reach the hut and take possession of those love-sick two. For the sake of thy great name and fame, oh honored master, for the love and gratitude I bear thy house, grant me this leave. Give me permission and unfettered power and I will cure the ill, restore thy child to thee and wreak such vengeance on that besotted offspring of a foul and leprous birth as shall establish for all time the fame of thy omnipotence."

Chow Lim ceased and for a minute, which seemed laden with ages, Tey Bee remained motionless, heedless of his words. Then with shaking forefinger, pointing to the door he whispered:

"As thou hast promised, so achieve. Let me be told the hour of vengeance that I may whet my jaded senses. Go."

OVER the east, dawn threw her first faint vaporous streamers. In the hut by the river, whose waters now ran calmly, Ming Po stirred restlessly in Yong Bee's arms, for sleep had overtaken them in the night. Her eyes opened and gazed upon his face. Her lips just pressed against his forehead. Over his hair her fingers strayed. For those few moments forgotten was her fear; she was content to be there in his arms and rest. Her lips, pouting and cool, were nearing his, when—a creaking noise just reached her ear. Quickly she turned, yet more quickly still a hand was placed upon her mouth and roughly she was pulled away. A thud, and Yong Bee was stretched unconscious on the floor. Over her head a darkness fell and once again she swooned.

3

A FLAMING ball of brass, the sun rode high in a cloudless sky. Before the great ivory and golden altar the joss-sticks burnt in great profusion and the great lamp, though dimmed by the midday sun, gave forth its mighty light.

The extended arms of the huge effigy of the spirit-god were empty, for the image of the naked man-child carved of age-old amber had been removed, since the day of Yong Bee Tey's birth.

The temple was deserted of its priests, for the hour was that of the midday meal. Over the sacred edifice a brooding spirit spread.

From the palace on the sister hill came the beating of a gong in twelve measured beats. Then silence. Then —through the outer courts came the unsteady, shuffling footsteps of men who bore a heavy burden. Closer and closer they came, entered the central court, then stopped before the altar.

Over the knees of the spirit-god one climbed, then stood up. His fingers found the navel, which he pressed. A hidden door in the great abdomen opened, giving to view a cavern in which two mighty springs reposed in the bowels of the god.

Chow Lim—for he it was who, though holding not the priestly rank, yet dared to so approach the god—signed to the waiting men beneath to pass him up their burden. Into the bowels of relentless fate he thrust a living body; then closed the door, descended from the graven knees and with his four companions departed.

OVER the land a dusk was creeping. It seemed to meet and mingle with a darkling haze that rose from the water-logged rice-fields, to fill the sea and sky with weird fantastic shapes and wreaths that went eddying and circling heavenward till the bright light of the newly risen moon was dulled to opaqueness.

By twos and threes the inmates of the huddled houses on the plain wended their way toward the great temple, for the edict had gone forth that they should gather to witness the punishment of one who had presumed to foul and besmirch the fame and dignity of the great house of Tey Bee Yong, governor omnipotent of China's largest province.

From the palace to the temple a steady stream of servants flowed. In their hearts was fear, in their minds a morbid curiosity.

Down the hill, across the narrow valley, up the temple path a golden litter bore the great Tey Bee Yong. Carefully the bearers bore it, gently they placed it in an almost hallowed spot close to the ivory and golden altar.

To the right and left the priests and temple servants stood with bowed shaven heads and shining pigtails.

The air was heavy with smoke from the myriad joss-sticks. The fierce light from the great lantern rose ever heavenward.

From behind the altar came the sound of chanting—a doleful wail of plaintive note. Its volume increased as all in the temple took up the refrain. Then suddenly it ceased.

In the ensuing silence the high priest came before the altar. On either side four golden steps were placed. Those on the left he slowly climbed, then stepped upon the knees of the mighty idol.

Through the great concourse a shudder ran, and as a single sob their gasp of terror went echoing along the roof. For now they knew beyond mistake the dreadful scene that they must witness.

Silence! Silence heavy and heart-rending.

From afar there came faintly, then slowly louder, the sound of shuffling footsteps. Up the full length of the great court, right through the packed and trembling onlookers Chow Lim led a figure muffled from head to foot, whose groping, stumbling footsteps would in any other circumstances have been ridiculous. Up to the base of the ivory and golden altar he led that muffled, silent figure and then stopped.

From the knees of the god the high priest spoke.

"O people and servants of the most high Tey Bee Yong, our lord, our master who rules us by the will of heaven, a crime has been committed against his name and house and thus against the very Deity of our God himself, the ever blessed Confucius. One of low birth and menial parentage, by arts and magic, by subtle use of lips and limb and honeyed words and drooping eyes has dared to scheme alliance with the sacred, god-descended house of Tey Bee Yong. For such a crime against our lord and master, for such impiety against the god, for the mere thought of so polluting the pure fount of birth, death is the only penalty."

He paused and once again a shudder ran through the congregation. Then the priests took up the cry, "Death to the foul polluter; death in the bowels and arms of the god!" The cry grew louder as from the throats of those present it soared upward. "Death to the foul polluter; death in the bowels and arms of the god!"

Then as the high priest raised his hand the cry subsided and all was still.

The raised hand slowly descended, passed down the figure of the god, found and rested on the navel, pressed it—and up from the cavern the bound figure of a man was flung, bleeding and torn, to fall and rest upon the outstretched arms.

From the veiled figure by Chow Lim, there burst a piercing shriek: "Yong Bee, my beloved!" From the golden litter came a heavy groan: "My son, my son!" as stupefied and numb with horror Tey Bee looked on. From the vast congregation rose a cry of fear. Only the high priest and Chow Lim remained immovable.

Slowly those outstretched arms curved upward and inward, raising the bound body toward the idol's breast; tighter the grip on the poor bound flesh. From the doomed wretch a cry was wrung: "Ming Po, my beloved!" Then with a shudder he hung limp and still.

Upward and inward those arms pressed—till the head fell limp on the shoulders, pressed till the legs dangled twisted in death.

Over the watching people a silence had fallen. Only the faint creaking machinery in the bowels of the god just faintly smote the air. Then—peal upon peal of maniac laughter as

the madness of Chow Lim broke bounds and the pent-up grievance of those years burst forth.

"Fool, fool!" he cried and pointed to the litter where the frozen image, Tey Bee Yong, sat dumb. "Thy day is done, thy name as dung upon the fields. Thou hast no son. That tortured wretch before thine eyes is not of thee, but of thy servant's stock, spawn of a swineherd's wife, whom I did change for thine own flesh and blood, the daughter of Moi Kam Moi. See, her full lips have met his lips of evil birth; her frail form lain in his foul embrace."

With a single rend he tore the draperies from Ming Po's body and with a bound bore her to the litter. "Thou hast called my wife a wanton, named me of filthy birth; behold thy daughter and her shame, who spent a night in the disused hut in the arms of a swineherd's son. Thy day is done, thy name a byword to the people; fouled of thy stock, no longer shall thy sway be owned. Cursed of the god, this night thy end is near; yet ere thou diest, witness how thy wanton offspring dies, too."

Into his arms he gathered the almost fainting Ming Po to swing her round his head—then stopped as his gaze became fixed on Tey Bee's face. Slowly the frenzy left him. Into the litter he pushed his head.

Over the great stillness his whisper spread. "Dead! He's dead! Tey Bee Yong, the governor, the omnipotent, is dead."

The Ode to Pegasus

A Dream-Tale

By MARIA MORAVSKY

ERIC could not sleep. There were mosquitoes in his room, and they sang in low monotonous voices the praise of sleeplessness. The pallid moon shone straight into his eyes, and in its waning light the boy saw the weathervane on the garage roof spinning round and round in the changing wind.

The weathervane represented a horse with wings, because, before the advent of automobiles, the garage used to be a stable. A famous family of horse-lovers kept their race-horses there. It had been long ago, Eric was told, maybe fifty years, maybe more . . . Eric was still of the age when fifty years and eternity are of practically the same length. The old weathervane silvered by the moon looked ancient to him, as ancient as the horse Pegasus of which he had recently learned in school. A wonderful horse!

The wind grew stronger, its direction still undefined. Eric felt sleepy now, his head dizzier and dizzier as the silver horse spun faster. Soon the buzzing of the mosquitoes grew faint, but another disturbing sound startled him: it was the whinnying of a horse.

Nobody kept horses on that modern street, in the up-to-date suburb where Eric's foster-parents owned their ultra-modern house. Even the

milkman would come shattering the early hours of the morning with the rattling automobile truck. Eric looked curiously down the deserted street, milky-white in the misty dawn. It seemed empty. Then some irresistible feeling of ill-directed curiosity made him look upward.

The moon was so pale now that it resembled a thin piece of melting ice. The gray roof of the distant ex-stable could not be discerned in the milky mists. Only the weathervane shone brightly, the top of its metallic wings reflecting the unseen sunrise.

The rounds it made now seemed wider and wider. It was as if the horse detached itself from its tether of steel wire. It was growing larger and larger, it flew more and more slowly around the roof's peak. Eric rubbed his eyes and jumped from the bed. Strange things began to happen.

The great horse flew lower. It reached Eric's window. It alighted on the broad roof of the veranda above which the small dormer window peeped at the world. Then, before Eric could formulate the sudden and beautiful desire, he saw it fulfilled. He was on the silvery back of the great horse, between the powerful wings beating the air with harmonious low swish.

Rosy clouds formed an oval track over which the great horse galloped. The unspeakable rapture which was Eric's began to fade as rapidly as it came; he heard his foster-mother's voice calling: "Eric, it's 7 o'clock! Are you up?"

She did not know how high up he was, thought Eric. He would not answer, for fear of disturbing her. She might worry about this new sport he had discovered. She was always extremely solicitous, caring for his safety till it hurt. No, he would not call back from his brilliant place in the clouds; but she might hear the swish of the great wings and look up, and then all the fun would end. He must prevent that. Gently he slapped the horse's shining side and whispered into its trembling ear: "Higher! Take me higher!"

The horse whinnied so that the buildings below trembled with awe. Its wings shot upward with uncanny speed. Never in his life had Eric ridden so fast, not even on that memorable day when his foster-father took him to the stadium and let him fly in an airplane.

"Eric!"

He heard his mother's voice growing weaker yet more penetrating than before. There was anxiety in it, and Eric could not bear that. Through his great exhilaration it sounded, persistent, appealing . . . He looked with a sigh toward the distant stars he had hoped to reach, then put his mouth against Pegasus' ear once more: "I must go down, to earth."

He closed his eyes, not to see the hateful descent. Heights often made him dizzy, and he was afraid to fall during the rapid downward flight. He opened his eyes only when his feet touched the window-sill of his room.

"THE boy is very nervous; too much day-dreaming. The other day when his teacher asked him what he would like to be when he grows up, he answered: 'A flyer in the sky.'"

Mr. Torrence smiled tolerantly at the anxiety sounding in his wife's voice.

"Well, it isn't such an impractical dream, after all. Many level-headed men become pilots nowadays. In fact, one has to be very level-headed to make a success of it. I would not object if Eric——"

"Edwin Torrence! Such a dangerous occupation! You would hardly allow him to choose it if the boy were your own child."

She instantly felt that the reproach was undeserved by her husband, who had been so fond of the boy, and amended her words with an affection-

ate pat on his shoulder. She admitted that she was too anxious about the boy. Feminine nonsense, all that! Yes, she would try to cure herself of it. It would be selfish to stand in the boy's way should he choose to become a pilot. Secretly she hoped he would not.

"As to his nervousness, we must consult a specialist," Mr. Torrence concluded hopefully. "It is natural at his age. The dangerous period between adolescence and youth, you know."

Mr. Torrence thought he knew all about what he called human mechanism.

As the years went by, several nerve specialists went over Eric's consciousness and subconsciousness with a fine-toothed comb. Nothing seemed neglected there, in the inner circle of his soul. He apparently overcame his habit of day-dreaming, and embraced willingly the risky but sane career of a pilot, which Mr. Torrence suggested to him, thinking that was what the boy wanted himself.

Eric no longer rode the great white horse. Instead, he mastered many ugly synthetic horses with dead motionless wings which depended on the noisy motors to lift them up to the sky. Once there, he seemed to regain the illusions of which the nerve specialists had robbed him. The rosy clouds at sunrise were almost as beautiful and exciting as during that first ride in the sky when he saw them from Pegasus' back.

Yet the airplane rides never gave him as much thrill as that first dazzling ride. Outwardly he was a careful, persevering, level-headed driver, always minding weather forecasts, never accepting insane bets. He would not loop the loop or engage in the neck-breaking pastime of the tail-spin. He would test most minutely every new plane entrusted to him, before he ever mounted it. It was because of these qualities that he was chosen to take a part in the great airplane race, the unseen track of which lay between New York and San Francisco.

His aged foster-mother was dead by now, so her kindly fretting and worry could not stop him from accepting the honor of the racing. His father, even more level-headed than his foster-son, saw no obstacles to it. He was rather proud of this boy whom he had made over, he thought, from a highly strung dreamer into a practical first-rate pilot. He would be dismayed, perhaps, and his pride would waver if he knew that, just on the day of the race, his level-headed foster-son was occupied with a thing which was anything but practical. In the midst of the last preparations and fixings of his plane, he laid down his grease-proof gloves, took out the thin penknife given to him by his foster-mother when he was a boy, and for the better half of an hour scratched something on the upper part of the left wing of the plane. When he finished his eyes held a distant and dreamy look like that which would steal into them in the days of his earliest childhood.

It was the last hour of the race. The great expanse of the Pacific widened before Eric's eyes, tired from incessant wind from which even his glasses could not wholly protect him. His face was hollow and smeared with perspiration. His head ached dully. It seemed to him that he had flown for days. He was so tired that he did not care any longer about the winning of the race. Although he was far ahead of all his competitors, the thought of it gave him no thrill. All his weary brain craved was unconsciousness. Unconsciousness of sleep or even death.

The numerous shocks of the changeable wind currents, the falling into air pockets, being beaten by the rain and sudden unexpected crop of

hail never predicted by the weather report, and above all these physical trials the supreme trial of ambition urging him on and on at top speed, ambition imposed upon him by his father's pride—all this was breaking his inner endurance. While his body still struggled on, the real Eric was almost unconscious of its efforts. He was so deathly tired, it seemed that nothing more could shock him.

But as his tired eyes glimpsed the greenish blue expanse of the misty ocean, with the large, queerly shaped clouds hung low over it, and the sea-gulls' wings catching the glimpses of the unseen sunshine hidden somewhere behind these low clouds, he experienced a shock similar to that of his first ride . . . Had it been his first ride in an airplane or a car, or—something else? He was so tired he could not recall it. Yet all his being strained like a hound on a leash, toward some great experience which was about to be his. The great clouds above sailed lower, became pregnant with some unseen presence . . . . Strange things began to happen.

A great white horse emerged from the farthest cloud. It grew nearer and nearer the rattling plane, drowning the unharmonious voice of the querulous motor with the musical swish of its wings.

"Pegasus!" cried Eric.

"Something is wrong with that motor," warned the first layer of his consciousness.

"Pegasus!" cried the real Eric.

The great horse was now near, within the reach of his hand. But his hands clung to the despised synthetic thing which he was driving. His eyes were looking upward, while his ears tried to detect the ominous missings in the beats of the motor. He was like a house divided against itself, when he felt strange waves of powerful thought coming toward him.

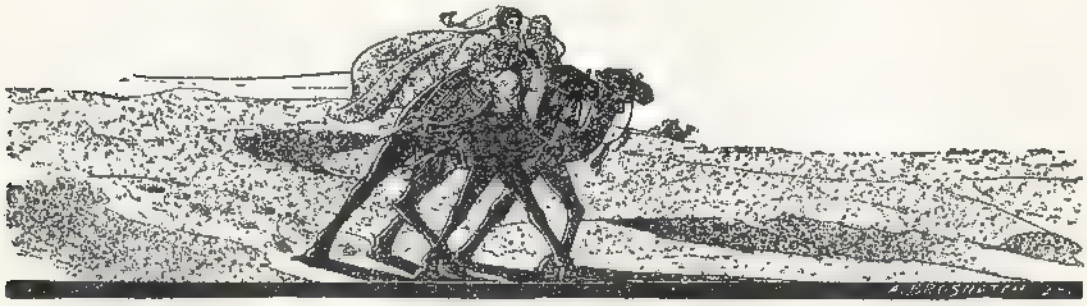
The luminous eyes of the great horse were now quite near. It was from them that the thoughts radiated. These orbs of concentrated moonlight flashed into his awed soul the message: "You have forgotten me! You have forgotten Pegasus, for this thing of metal and gas."

"I never forgot you!" shouted Eric. "Look on the outside of the left wing! I have written an ode in your honor. It is scratched on the aluminum so clearly a sea-gull could read it."

"Then leave this machine and mount me," came the luring command.

His mortally tired hands ceased to cling to the guide-stick. Overwhelming dizziness came over him. He lurched forward, then leapt. Next moment he was on the back of the great horse heading into eternity.

The mangled thing they found among the steaming wreck of the winning airplane was not Eric. It was only his body worn to death by the tiresome realities of life.



The FIEND of the MARSH

by

MAJOR ROBERT EMMETT LEWIS
AND
MARTHA MAY COCKRILL

"Five bursts of flame flashed from the extended weapon in rapid succession."

"MY GOD! What's that?" Graveland Stannard spoke nervously, the tense, strained tones betraying marked alarm.

From somewhere outside the magnificent residence of the famous expert in plastic surgery there had suddenly come a long, piercing, brutelike wail, splitting the sultry blackness of the warm June night with startling and mournful cadence. Weirdly, like a melancholy warning from the spirit world, the terrifying, unearthly cry had come to these two erring young souls.

The girl-wife of the great surgeon—blond, shapely and pretty, a weak flapper whose prayerbook was a pack of cards, whose rosary was a cigarette case, and whose prayer was made to a bottle of synthetic gin—answered the man's nervous inquiry lightly as she again pressed her warm, red lips to those of the dark young artist, but there was also a noticeable trace of agitation present in her voice.

"It is only Terror, the doctor's great wolf," she said, reassuringly. "Don't be such a coward, Stan—it's only Terror quarreling with some of the animals the doctor keeps for his nasty experiments! Oh, Stan! He *is* a wonderful man—but I hate him! I'm afraid of him, too, Stan dear—he's so cold and hard and cruel!"

"The doctor is a great man," young Stannard declared, "but I've heard that in his vivisection-experiments he is absolutely without feeling!"

The doctor's pretty young wife lay contentedly in the young artist's arms. Suddenly he felt her tremble a little.

"Stan, sometimes I'm horribly afraid! He—he's terrible! Once, a young farmer, who used to beat his wife, had bruised his hand in doing so, and when the doctor heard of it he amputated every finger of the man's hand, one by one, without an anesthetic, claiming the encroachment of blood-poisoning to be so rapid he had not the time to use anesthesia! Oh, my God! it was horrible!"

The woman again pressed her hot lips tremblingly to those of the man.

Instantly there came again the long, sinister, baying howl. The woman with difficulty repressed a scream—she clung tightly to the young man.

Graveland Stannard was no coward. But the terrifying significance of that uncanny cry appalled him.

Strange and uneasy yelps of terror and frightened whimperings came from the other animals through the hot night air. Then quite suddenly came a deadly quiet, a fearful, throbbing silence. Like an unspoken prophecy of dread import came the uneasy nerve-racking silence like the sultry calm before a tropic storm. The woman shuddered.

Just outside the open bedroom window, through which the balmy night air of June whisperingly entered and gently fanned, with spirit-like touch, the heated faces of the woman and her lover, there suddenly came a deep menacing growl, followed by a sharp, but low-voiced command spoken by human tongue.

"My God! The doctor!" she whispered brokenly. In frantic fright she clung to Stannard. "For God's sake, Stan, he'll kill me!" The words were inarticulate; chattering teeth forbade clear enunciation, but the woman's attitude bespoke the wildly agonizing fear she felt.

The man thrust her from him rudely. "You said he was in New York!" he reproached her roughly.

In the darkness of the room Graveland Stannard moved rapidly away from the woman. His hand touched his hip pocket—his revolver was there. "Thank heaven for a dark night!" he muttered.

The woman lay quite still upon the couch in a paralysis of fear.

Outside in the inky darkness of the garden a tall, slender man, black of hair and eye and with pointed black beard, spoke quietly again to a great crouching black beast that whimpered at his feet.

Graveland Stannard knew every step he was taking in the unlighted house. His fingers had closed over the switch in the hallway, the quick pressure bringing instant darkness. He crossed rapidly to the side opposite to that from which had come the dread voice of the physician he had so deeply injured.

Stannard straddled the window casing and let himself down cautiously, striving for a safe footing below. Once in the little grove of pines that just skirted the house at this point, he knew he could make his escape to the roadway unseen.

As his feet touched the ground a deep, brutish snarl greeted him. Grim despair seized Stannard. With wild frenzy he jerked from his pocket the loaded revolver, but a human hand suddenly seized his wrist with a grip of steel. The tall, black-bearded man bent Stannard's arm upward and back, until the muzzle of the weapon pointed skyward. Frantically Stannard strove to bring it to bear on his powerful antagonist, but he was as a child in the hands of the silent, grim, unseen foe. Twisting and writhing, he sought to grasp the tall man with his left hand. . . . Suddenly the weapon was discharged. Stannard felt a sharp, stinging little pain, like a tiny pin-prick, in the fleshy part of his left arm—a sudden sickening nausea—faintness—an overpowering drowsiness. Without a

cry, without even a moan, he sank upon the soft grass, unconscious.

The tall, black-bearded man spoke again, calmly, to the great black beast, which had by his command remained a snarling neutral during the struggle. The great shadowy shape again crouched tremblingly at his feet, whimpering in a sudden and inexplicable fear of its master.

The tall, dark man stooped. In his hand was a tiny, bright instrument. With one hand he caught up the loose flesh on the creature's back and then suddenly plunged the deadly little instrument deep therein. A little sting, like the bite of a horsefly, was felt by the beast, then it sank to the ground, an inert, crumpled mass like the senseless man at its side.

The hyoscin had done its work well.

GRAVELAND STANNARD woke suddenly from a nightmare of horrors to the realization that he was alive and the belief that he had been dreaming. Instantly, however, a nauseating weakness seized him. His head and face throbbed painfully; his heart beat violently. He had a strange sensation of unfamiliarity with respect to his physical person; in some inexplicable way he seemed to have lost the sense of his own identity. He felt queerly ill. The acrid fumes of some powerful anesthetic arose from his lungs; its pungent odor filled the room. Dread filled his mind.

He was not in his own quarters—he was in a shaky, ramshackle bed in a cheap and dingy room. And beside him, in a drug-wrought stupor, lay the woman—his companion in sin!

Ugh! He turned from her in sudden disgust and loathing, and the quick movement brought a sharp increase of the queer pain in his face and forehead.

With trembling fingers he touched his face. Merciful heaven! What was the matter with him? In touching his face his hand had come in contact with long, coarse, bristly, animal-like hair!

"Good God!" Stannard gasped in bewilderment. This was no dream! What horrible thing had happened to him?

He sprang from the bed with a queer, catlike leap and rose to his full height in front of the the cracked mirror. For one instant only he looked in horrified amazement at the beastlike visage that glared back at him from the cracked glass, then, with an ejaculation of terror and startled wonder, he backed quickly away from the awful reflection.

For what the amazed and perplexed creature that had once been a man had now seen before him was the black, bristly, sharp-muzzled visage of a wolf—a great black wolf's head covered with long, coarse, matted hair with which his own coal-black hair seemed to mingle as though it had always been an integral part! Narrow, cruel, yellowish-black slant eyes blazed balefully at him!

Through the same mysterious, supernatural agency which had wrought the puzzling, fantastic and mind-destroying change, his chin had, in some inexplicable manner, risen to meet his nose, with which it now formed the long, sharp, horrible snout of a wolf. Black gums, rolling back from the long aperture which now formed his mouth, disclosed a great lolling red tongue flanked by rows of sharp, flashing white fangs—four saberlike incisors interlapping at the forward opening of the saliva-dripping jaws!

With a wild yelping howl, half human, half beastlike in its ferocity, the weird thing leaped madly over the bed and the silent, drug-stupefied woman who lay as one dead. Crouching for an instant, it gave vent to another maddened, terrifying howl of defiance, and then it leaped from the

floor straight through the open window, falling instantly, with wild yells of terror, into the noisily rushing waters of the swollen river below, the madly swirling current of which eagerly caught the unfortunate man in its icy embrace. The hapless creature was carried by the fiercely raging torrent for miles, the limp, grotesque body kept afloat upon some driftwood, and finally thrown upon the shore.

As for the woman, she still lay in deathlike sleep on the unclean bed in the garishly furnished room of a cheap lodging house of questionable repute, in a lurid locality. Her once beautiful features were distorted and twisted out of all semblance of human shape; through the sorcery of a surgical genius the former delicate face had become a hideous, grinning, animal-like mask, covered in patches with grotesque bunches of the long, coarse black hair of a wolf!

2

DR. ARTIE GREEN, the principal druggist of Stappington, stood in the doorway of his store on Main Street, engaged in pointing out to his new clerk from the city, young Mr. Percy Carthage, the various celebrities and notables of the village.

Mr. Carthage—blue-eyed, neatly clad in black, pin-striped suiting, white shirt and collar and little black bow tie—was deeply appreciative of the honor being shown him by his hospitable and unexacting employer.

"There goes Bill Tucker! Hey, Bill!" Dr. Green shouted; "c-mon over heah a minute! Bill's our sheriff," he explained to his alert, rather serious new assistant.

A big gaunt man in belted corduroy breeches, wearing boots, a wide sombrero and a big silver star, shambled over to the entrance of the store.

"Howdy, Art!—Glad to know you, sir!" he drawled, acknowledging Dr. Green's introduction and giving the young man's hand a powerful grip. "How you be, Doc?"

"So-so, Bill! Anything new about the Haunted Marshwoods?"

"Yes!" replied the sheriff grimly. "Tom Hammond's gal, Betty, swears she was chased, and nearly caught, last night by the Old Devil of the Marsh himself! I reckon it's mostly all talk, though—there ain't nothin' bad ever really happened near those rotten old woods—yet. I don't believe there is anything in that ole swamp but snakes and toads and vermin. No self-respecting animal—or devil either, for that matter—would stay in the gloomy foul old place a minute even if it wasn't haunted—it's too derned rotten!" the sheriff declared emphatically. "Well—see you boys again." He bit off an enormous chew of tobacco, and lazily took his departure.

"Mighty queer thing about that worthless piece of ground," said Dr. Green. "Just as Bill says, I don't believe there's a living thing in there 'cept deadly reptiles, poisonous insects and lice. Nothing grows in there but the rankest of weeds; all the trees have died and are rotten, and the whole growth—trees and rotten old stumps—is slowly sinkin' into the miserable place—nasty, gloomy old bog—be a derned good thing if it would sink altogether."

"What was that the sheriff said about something chasing Betty Hammond?" the new clerk asked.

"Oh, yes. Well, we call it the Haunted Marsh! You see, some pretty wild stories have been told about that queer place and a lot of us people think it is haunted by a terrible kind of a Thing—a ghost that is half man—half devil! The Marsh Fiend, folks call it. Some swear they have heard it yell at night, and others say they have seen it, too, but I have never heard anything or seen anything either. Some of the girls claim

to have seen it; others swear the awful Thing chased them—just as Betty did!"

"Shade of Dante! What a fantastic, sinister story! The Marsh Fiend! Half man—half devil! Must be a mighty grotesque creature," said young Mr. Carthage, with a shudder.

"There goes the smartest man in town, and wealthy, too," said the fat little druggist, pointing out a tall, white-haired, smooth-shaven man of about fifty, who was driving a big car of foreign make. "That's Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone—he's an all-around scientist, I can tell you! A fine, high-principled man, but very peculiar, cold and silent—a cynic, I guess one would call him—hasn't lived in Stappington very long. That was his daughter Lucille with him—she's his only child; mother's dead. Nice child, but queer; she don't talk much. Old Blackstone has a secretary, a pretty little girl named Mary Tabor; and she told my Jennie that the old man and Lucille live in constant fear of something, nobody seems to know what! But there's a story going round—Dr. Timmins, our coroner, says he had it right from Blackstone's housekeeper herself—that Dr. Blackstone won't let Lucille out of his sight scarcely—fears somebody will kidnap her or kill her, I reckon! — Well, I declare, Miss Rosie! What will you have?" He turned his attention to a plumply pretty, rosy-cheeked, full-breasted country girl who had just entered the store. "Mr. Carthage, this is Miss Rosie Carlinson, the youngest daughter of one of our biggest farmers—shade hands with Mr. Carthage, Rosie."

Miss Rosie blushed a delightful crimson, and, after a shy word or two, departed with her quinine and peppermint drops.

"Doctor, how long has that old wooded marsh been haunted?" asked Mr. Carthage.

"Far back as I can remember—ever since I was a boy!" replied Dr. Green. "And I can recall hearing the old folks talk about it being haunted in their young days! Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone says only fools talk such nonsense, but I can tell you, my boy, that my father was no fool, and I've heard him tell, many a time, how he saw queer things—lights and white shapes and fiendlike things a-dancing in those old woods at night! And he would swear that he had heard the old Marsh Devil a-howling—always after midnight!"

A solemn-looking old man, crippled, wearing the faded blue of the Union army, entered the store with long swinging strides of his crutches, pivoting easily and rapidly on the one leg the Southern guns had left him.

"Hello, Uncle Joey!" Dr. Green called cheerily. "See here, Uncle Joe, I want you to tell Mr. Carthage here, my new clerk, all you know about the Haunted Marshwood—he don't believe it's haunted."

Uncle Joey suddenly straightened up in the crutches and hastily crossed himself. "The less said about such things, the better," he rumbled in a deep bass. "I prefer to keep my mind on God Almighty—leave the Devil be! He can take care of himself; he don't need discussin'; he's far too well known as it is!"

The old soldier got his snuff and tobacco and departed quite agilely in wide, leaplike strides.

Young Mr. Carthage became quite thoughtful. There was certainly something to this fantastic mystery of the Haunted Wood. A gloomy, forbidding, rotten marshland—a sinister, mysterious old bog into whose depths no human foot had penetrated for centuries, perhaps. The "Marsh Devil" they called it. Suppose there was really a fiend—some hideous ap-

parition—some ghostly phantom—in the Haunted Marsh! The young man shuddered. It was uncanny.

"Howdy, Dr. Green!" said a sweet voice with a ripple of silver laughter in it.

A brown-eyed, dark-haired vision of loveliness in a white organdy frock stood framed in the doorway. She wore no hat, and the late afternoon sun shot rich high-lights in the heavy coils of dark brown hair and sought out tiny freckles on her nose and under her lovely eyes. The point of a fluffy, billowy parasol of some white shimmering stuff rested upon the toe of a tiny white kid pump, through which a dainty, highly-arched instep burst, showing the pink tint of the satin-soft white flesh beneath the white silken hose.

"Well, Miss Mary! You surely are a sight for sore eyes! How are you? Just saw your boss and Miss Lucille drive by a while ago. Mr. Carthage, this is Miss Mary Tabor, Dr. Blackstone's secretary. Miss Mary—Mr. Carthage."

To the sophisticated young man, the simplicity, daintiness, fresh, natural loveliness of Mary Tabor was a revelation.

Miss Mary Tabor gave one quick look at Mr. Carthage, then held out her cool little hand. Mr. Carthage took that little hand as if it were broken glass. He tried his best to speak, but only a hoarse, choking sound was heard. Thus began another love story.

3

DR. GEOFFREY BLACKSTONE, the scientist, was certainly a most unusual man. There was something very odd about him; a certain reserve which gave one a marked impression of a studied aloofness. Some said it was reticence—the retiring disposition of a great man. Others declared it was fear—an indefinite fear—a constant, nerve-paralyzing fear of some unknown but dreadful fate! He seemed always on the alert, a continual, nerve-straining *qui vive;* but whether it was for his own safety or that of his daughter, no one could say. All that people really saw was the cold, unsmiling, cynical man of science. Dr. Blackstone was said to be a hard, cruel man. He was certainly a sinisterly silent one!

Lucille Blackstone was a quiet girl. Save for her motor rides with the doctor, she lived in the lonely seclusion of her father's home, seeing no one other than Mary Tabor, the doctor's lovely young secretary, and the taciturn and morose old Scotch couple who were Dr. Blackstone's only servants.

Like the doctor, Lucille was dark; her hair and eyes were black, but there was absolutely no other resemblance. She was not pretty, but she was finely educated and possessed marked artistic talent.

The big limousine of Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone carrying its two silent and morose passengers—father and daughter—passed the Haunted Marsh.

Dark, dank and dismal, enveloped in its almost perpetual fog from which fanciful shredded mists arose like dim specters of long-dead loves, the gloomy, forbidding thing stood before one like a fever-inspired, ghostly mirage, silent as the grave, save for the occasional mournful croak of a frog. Against the gray, soul-chilling fog, the bare black branches of the dead trees rose skyward like skeleton fingers thrusting from the depths of hell.

Far up in the sky, just over the dim, shadowy graveyard of trees, a great vulture hung suspended, a silent, sinister symbol of the decay of all things just beneath.

To the east of the Haunted Marshwood a great river flowed turbulent-

ly past its misty edge, slashing its gloomy shore with malevolent fury.

The gray-faced girl in the car gave one quick shuddering look, then turned and moved closer to the stern-faced, silent man beside her, who looked neither to the right nor the left, but whose moody gaze seemed fixed on something far ahead in the future. When he again looked on the girl's melancholy face it was the same old look of fear he saw there—a rigidly set look of hopeless despair. It was the fear of some fantastically terrible fate that was to overtake her that was featured in the depressed mind of the girl—a brooding insanity, or perhaps it was a look of long-fostered, malignant hate and deep distrust of the doctor himself.

But why should she hate him? The girl did not know—she certainly could not even suspect.

Yet, Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone loved his queer, silent daughter better than life itself—he lived only for her!

THE days passed quickly for Percy Carthage. His romantic young soul, craving love and adventure, caused him to divide his time between love's young dream and the Haunted Marsh.

Night after night, after saying good-night to Mary Tabor, he walked past the dreary, mournful waste, his loaded revolver clutched tightly in his side pocket. The lonely, mist-veiled marshwood held for him an eery fascination. Just what he expected to see or hear he did not know—but he hoped and prayed for it no matter what it was.

He saw nothing. He heard nothing save the occasional hoot of an owl or the melancholy croak of a raven.

Upon one night in particular, after he had escorted Mary Tabor home from a motion picture show, some impulse drew him to the desolate but fascinating place. Once there, emboldened by the white light of a full moon, he made an attempt to pierce the thicket of thorn-brush which edged the treacherous, mud-oozing ground of the gloomy morass. Successful in this, at the cost of bleeding hands and torn legs, his first steps toward the heart of the Haunted Marsh resulted in his body sinking almost to the knees in the clutching mud. Only with extreme difficulty had he extricated himself from the perilous predicament, and again essayed the prickly barrier for the safety of the open roadway.

The awful stillness of the gruesome place had been destroyed by his frantic, crashing exit therefrom. He had no sooner reached the road than there came a long, mournful shriek that suddenly ended in a burst of cackling, sardonic laughter.

When a lad at school, Mr. Carthage had run rather well. He found he had improved most amazingly since then.

ONE morning the village folk were horrified by the finding of pretty little Rosie Carlinson, bruised and bleeding and unconscious, on the roadway at the edge of the Haunted Marsh.

The previous night Rosie had left home about sundown to visit the family of a neighboring farmer. She never reached the home of her friends.

Upon regaining consciousness all she could remember was that when she was crossing the roadway near the Haunted Marsh, she was suddenly and suffocatingly seized by the throat, from behind. Before losing consciousness she had caught one glimpse of a terrible Thing with a great black head, from which, on either side, there protruded short, pointed horns.

Sheriff Tucker and the town marshal quickly organized a posse of eager volunteers, of which Mr. Carthage was an early and ardent member. Attempt after attempt to enter and search the Haunted Marshwood was

made, but the deadly tenacity of the dangerous quagmire forced them to abandon the search after one man had nearly lost his life. At night the loathsome place had again been surrounded by the incensed farmers, and volley after volley from rifles and shotguns had been sent hurtling into every part of its noisome, poisonous depths, but had resulted only in eliciting defiant, ear-splitting howls of rage from the unseen Fiend of the Marsh, which he alternated with shrill bursts of fearful, taunting laughter.

The following day in the bright sunlight a few of the more venturesome younger men succeeded in making a search of the lonely place, endangering their lives in the treacherous bog-land of the Haunted Marsh. Their efforts were unsuccessful—they found nothing alive save reptiles and woodlice. They heard nothing, save the hoarse croaking of the frogs.

Feeling ran high in the little village for a while. Anger was, however, most futile; none seemed able to cope with the situation.

Rosie Carlinson recovered slowly. Excitement, which had been at fever pitch, subsided rapidly, as it always does.

The search for the Fiend of the Marsh was given up as hopeless.

"Percy," said Mary Tabor one day, "do you know, I'm afraid of Dr. Blackstone lately! He watches me so closely—he asked me about you, too. Wanted to know if you carried a revolver. I told him I did not know. Do you?"

"No!" replied Percy; "that is, not always. But you tell him 'no' if he asks you again."

Miss Tabor daintily sipped her chocolate soda.

"I really believe Dr. Blackstone is afraid of that old Marsh Devil! When I spoke of the Haunted Wood, I saw fear—positive fear, or dread of *something*—in his eyes! *I'm* not afraid of that old Marsh Fiend—I'd go by there any time—I've a pistol," proudly. "I showed it to the doctor and Lucille; I've gone by that nasty old marsh many a time, and nothing ever happened to *me!*"

Young Mr. Carthage suddenly went quite white.

"Good Lord, Mary! Please don't do that! Please, if you love me, don't do that! For God's sake don't go near that place alone!"

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary. Shall! *Must!*" defiantly proclaimed that perverse young lady. Her dark eyes grew very bright; the crimson little mouth settled into a straight, determined line, and the flush of coral pink deepened markedly in her cheeks.

"Mary! Please don't——"

Mary smiled a quick, dimply little smile; her pretty eyes twinkled roguishly. "Thank you so very much for the nice soda, *Doctor* Carthage!" she said with mock formality, and quite calmly departed.

Young Mr. Carthage stared moodily at nothing. He suddenly registered a solemn vow that he would not leave Mary Tabor's side for a second in the evenings. Why did Dr. Blackstone want to know if he carried a gun? What was Dr. Blackstone afraid of? Surely not of *him*. Or was he really afraid? Was Dr. Blackstone the——?

"Hey! Percy! Ma is waiting for you to come to dinner," the ruddy-faced little druggist announced.

4

Several days later Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone, accompanied by Lucille, went to the metropolis, driving the big car himself.

When they did not return from this regular weekly trip at the usual time, Miss Mary Tabor allowed just one hour to elapse before her nerves

got the better of her; then she telephoned to Percy Carthage.

Almost at the same instant Andy McKeown, a farmer, and Sheriff William Tucker, lifted the inert and unconscious body of Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone from the farmer's wagon and carried him into the drugstore. There was an ugly wound in the forehead from which the blood was slowly trickling.

Andy McKeown had found him on the roadway just at the edge of the Haunted Wood. The doctor's car lay overturned in a ditch, evidently having been precipitated there through sudden loss of control. His assailant, no doubt, had sprung upon the running board of the moving car; a struggle, apparently, had followed, in which the doctor had been struck upon the head with some heavy, blunt instrument, and the car, lacking a guiding hand, had veered into the ditch and turned turtle.

The idea of an accident was out of the question, for Lucille had mysteriously disappeared. Not even a trace of her could be found.

On regaining consciousness Dr. Blackstone informed the sheriff and the town marshal, who had taken him to his home, that just about dusk, as he was passing the Haunted Marsh on his way home, a shadowy, grotesque form suddenly burst from the slowly rising mists which partly screened the marshwoods from the roadway, and with apelike agility it had leaped upon the rapidly moving machine.

In grappling with his assailant, which had the face of a devil and emitted demoniac howls of rage as it fought madly, he was forced to relinquish the wheel. Paralyzed with fear, Lucille made no attempt to control the swerving car. Before it plunged into the ditch, the horrible Thing struck the doctor a terrific blow on the head—just as the car overturned.

Led by Sheriff Tucker, the town marshal, and Sam Carlinson—the father of poor little Rosie, first victim of the Marsh Fiend—the posse of irate farmers quickly organized again.

An all-night search ensued. Sheriff Tucker and Percy Carthage penetrated the marsh for quite a distance before the sheriff, losing the little trail of semi-solid ground which they had found with great difficulty, sank to his armpits in the treacherous bog. An hour was lost in rescuing the sheriff.

Reinforcements were obtained and the entire stretch of loathsome marsh was surrounded. Frantic attempts were made by the incensed men to comb its entire extent. Their endeavors were temporarily abandoned only after three men had sunk in the quagmire.

Sam Carlinson's idea to fire the whole poisonous confine was rejected for the reason that if Lucille was held a helpless prisoner somewhere within the rotten heart of the swamp, her death would be caused along with that of her mysterious captor.

Lanterns, boards and ropes were procured. By laying the boards flat upon the surface of the mire, the men were enabled, after considerable difficulty and only by keeping a tight hold upon the ropes with which they had formed a human chain, to locate the pathway of semi-solid ground again.

Several huge footprints were found upon this pathway closely resembling those of a human being, but gigantic in size and grotesque in shape. These led to the foot of an enormous dead tree in which it seemed the fiend had taken refuge with his prey. Just where its three largest limbs forked there was a large opening.

Whether the loathsome Thing was hidden in the tree with the unfortunate girl, or had simply climbed it, and, swinging apelike from its branches to those of the adjoining

dead oaks, had passed to some hidden lair in the heart of the marshwood was matter of conjecture. But the men lost no time, and the mighty ringing blows of their sharp axes soon leveled the rotten tree, and split its mighty trunk full wide. Save for the loose, rotten bark, the great tree was empty.

Swinging out in a wide circle, but connected by the ropes to the main force who kept to the safer pathway, the sheriff, Sam Carlinson, young Mr. Carthage and the town marshal pushed through the pitch-dark wooded morass.

Fitful little eery bursts of flame, flashing first one place and then another, gave an elfin touch of mystery to the weird scene. The posse of bearded, stern-faced men, carrying lanterns and armed with rifles, revolvers and axes, followed silently, with grim purpose, the devious windings of the little path which wound in labyrinthine circles about the mist-shrouded swampwood.

From time to time, fiendish yells of derision and bursts of sardonic laughter—demoniac, blood-curdling, hair-raising—quickened the pulses of those sturdy men. Abandoning the ropes, leaping from semi-solid ground to points of safety, with mighty efforts the wide line swung toward the point from which the terrible cries appeared to come, only to find, when the two ends converged, that the Devil of the Marsh had disappeared, and to be instantly greeted with its maddening yells and taunting shrieks of derision from some far portion of the wood.

Unable to cope in the blackness of the night with the baffling movements of the uncanny Thing, the men placed pickets about the marshwood in close proximity, and abandoned the search until daylight.

Goaded to madness by the awful crime, the posse, reinforced by horrified farmers from a neighboring village, made a thorough and systematic search of the Haunted Marsh. Although they covered its entire extent, not a trace or sign of its inhuman, evil and weird inhabitant could be found.

At daybreak, just within the thornbrush and poison-ivy thicket which completely edged the entire circumference of the marsh, they found the remains of young Lucille Blackstone.

At the conclusion of the inquest, Dr. Blackstone, pale and trembling, his head swathed in bandages, rose from his seat in the crowded office of Dr. Timmins, the coroner.

The room was at once cleared of all except the coroner, the sheriff, the town marshal, Dr. Green and young Mr. Carthage.

"It is rather unusual, Dr. Blackstone." The coroner spoke doubtfully. "But I guess it's all right, in the interest of science; and as it is you——"

"It is quite regular, I assure you, doctor!" Dr. Blackstone spoke slowly and calmly, but a marked suppression of feeling was evidenced by the tense tones of the aristocratic, white-haired old scientist. "It is not only in the interest of science, doctor; it is an attempt to identify, if it is possible to do so, now—the murderer of my daughter!

"By photographing the retina of the eyes of the victim," he continued, in queerly cold, unfeeling tones, "a good likeness of the murderer may be obtained!

"I ask your patience, gentlemen—I shall explain. While pursuing my medical studies in Europe I was fortunate enough to witness many unusual and startling experiments. I met Monsieur Bertillon, the great criminologist; he was engaged at that particular time in endeavoring to construct a photographic apparatus so powerful that with it he could photograph the retina of the human

eye, which at the same time magnified it so greatly that a clear image of the individual last seen by the victim would readily be reproduced.

"But, gentlemen, Monsieur Bertillon failed; I succeeded, after much labor and perseverance. I now propose, gentlemen, to obtain a photograph of the last thing seen by my daughter in life—her murderer, the Fiend of the Marsh!"

With the assistance of Dr. Timmins, the coroner, Dr. Blackstone then calmly and skilfully photographed the retinas of his dead daughter's eyes. He then returned to his home and went at once to his dark room to develop the plates.

Five minutes later, Mary Tabor, at work in the office of the old scientist which adjoined the room in which the doctor was then engaged on his gruesome task, heard an agonized groan and a sudden crash. When she burst open the door of the dark room, Dr. Blackstone lay upon the floor unconscious. At his feet lay the remains of a recently developed plate—still wet from the hyposulfite of soda.

Later, when Mary Tabor pieced the broken parts of the plate together and made a quick print therefrom, it only showed her the rather prepossessing face of a dark, sullen-looking young man—whose features bore quite a marked resemblance to those of Lucille Blackstone.

5

The picket guard of the Haunted Marsh was rigorously continued, with military precision and discipline, for a whole week. Several further attempts to penetrate its infernal depths had been made, but these, like all preceding ones, proved most disappointing and unsuccessful.

During the night following the finding of the body of the unfortunate young girl, one of the guards declared that he had seen a great, apelike creature swinging nimbly among the branches of one of the dead trees. He had emptied both rifle and revolver at the uncanny Thing, but for some inexplicable reason the shots took no effect—the Thing disappearing with supernatural suddenness, although its defiant screams and yells of derision were heard by the guards long afterward.

Plans had been formed to burn to the ground the entire stretch of the dismal marshwood by means of oils and chemicals. After being carefully considered, however, they were abandoned as impracticable. Other plans were discussed, none of which proved feasible, and these, like the one to fire the terrible place, were abandoned, one by one, as the horror of the murder abated and the anger of the people cooled.

October came, bringing the glorious harvest moon.

About midnight, just two weeks after the funeral of Dr. Blackstone's daughter, the slender figure of a girl, dressed in white, passed slowly and hesitatingly along the edge of the Haunted Marsh. Framed against the somber black of the wood, from which arose gigantic, spectral mists, the dead whiteness of her garments stood out in startling, mysterious relief.

The pale moonlight tinted with eery touch each slowly rising, phantomlike vapor with a fanciful tracery of sickly green. The doleful cry of a whippoorwill broke the silence.

The girl seemed entirely unaware of the lateness of the hour and the loneliness of the dreadful place, and was apparently oblivious to the hidden danger that lurked menacingly within the Haunted Marsh—the horrible, slant-eyed fiend whose lusting glances followed every move of her young body.

Upon reaching the end of the dismal marshwood which led into a

wide, open field, the girl turned and retraced her steps. As she did so, a great, shadowy shape moved noiselessly and rapidly just inside the tangled hedge of thorn-brush and creeping poison-ivy, which, like a bristling array of elfin spears, guarded the entrance to the filthy morass.

The terrible Thing was following her, moving silently and swiftly, with sinister intent.

The moon passed into a cloud-bank, blotting out its mystic tracery of the ghostly mists and covering the Haunted Marsh and the roadway with inky blackness.

With a snarl of frenzied lust the Thing leaped the prickly hedge with tigerlike swiftness, and landing lightly on all fours ten feet from its victim, crouched for the final brutal spring. Just as it leaped the thorn-brush hedge, the girl suddenly whirled about with startling rapidity, and backing off a few feet, quickly extended her right arm in its direction. As the weird Thing sprang toward her in a mighty leap, five bursts of flame flashed from the extended weapon in rapid succession.

The Fiend of the Marsh screeched wildly—flopped grotesquely to the roadway and sprawled out, a great, black, quivering, beastlike shape! The moon left the cloud-bank, throwing a gigantic shadow of the awful Thing on the roadway.

Awkwardly the girl pulled up the white dress and from some hidden pocket drew a second weapon. Keeping her eyes steadily on the still writhing fiend, she advanced upon it cautiously, covering the prostrate Thing with loaded revolver. The Thing on the ground gave a convulsive shudder, then lay quite still.

The Fiend of the Marsh was no more.

Young Mr. Carthage wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with the back of his right hand. Tucking up the unusual and encumbering skirts, he bent over the Thing.

"Shades of all the demons! Half man and half beast!" he said, in tones of horror, as he gazed at the great, black, hairy head.

6

The Fiend of the Haunted Marsh lay on a table in the office of the coroner—a cloth covered the grisly head.

In turn, Coroner Timmins, Sheriff Tucker, Talbot Giddings—the gray-haired old town marshal—Dr. Green and many of the farmers had viewed with amazement and repulsion the frightful monster.

Freak of birth or creation of the Devil? The grotesque monstrosity lay stiff and cold, its fiendish activities over. Though its horrid black head of a beast was covered, the body of the queer creature was exposed. The muscular torso, legs and arms of a human being were covered with long black hair, matted and splotched with dried black mud from the awful swamp which had so long served as its abode.

Percy Carthage described how he had tricked and killed the fiend.

The informal proceedings came quickly to an end.

"Well, that is the end of the Fiend of the Marsh. Thank God!" said Dr. Timmins, with a feeling of intense relief that was experienced by all present.

The men arose to leave.

"But—good Lord, doctor! How do you account for this fantastic abnormality?" asked little Dr. Green.

"Yes, doctor," young Mr. Carthage supplemented, "that is the question."

The door opened suddenly and Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone quietly entered. He was very pale. He bowed with quiet dignity to each man present.

"Gentlemen," he spoke solemnly, sadly, "I have a favor to ask. Will

you be seated? I have something to say."

A sense of the unusual, an awed expectancy, an overwhelming wave of curiosity surged through the minds of all present. They resumed their seats.

Dr. Blackstone remained standing. His thin, sharp, esthetic face was almost as white as his hair. He walked to the table whereon lay the Fiend of the Marsh. He raised the cloth, giving a single quick glance of repulsion. With hands that trembled he quickly replaced the cloth, then turned to face his fellow men.

"Gentlemen," he began, with quiet dignity, "that monster was once a man—a handsome, cultured man."

The old scientist was silent for a moment; then he spoke again: "Once, gentlemen, I had the reputation of being the world's greatest neuro-facial surgeon—a specialist in plastic surgery. Of middle age, I had a beautiful young wife. I was happy. But my happiness was short-lived. A handsome young artist named Graveland Stannard won the affections of my wife. I knew she was untrue. My love died instantly, but my vanity and self-esteem suffered a keen hurt. My honor was smirched. A fierce hatred overpowered me; my direst anger was aroused; rage obsessed me. Through my great surgical skill I determined to avenge the soul-killing injury I had been made to suffer, to make them both pay a hellish toll for the wrong they had done me.

"I left my home ostensibly for a trip to New York, but late that very night I returned quietly to my home. Graveland Stannard was there, she was in his arms! I heard their voices as I stood outside beneath the window, in the warm, beautiful June night. I left the garden, skirted the garage, and entered the building where I kept my animals for experimentation. I had a great black Russian wolf; through much experiment and kindness he had become quite tame, even affectionate, toward me; none else dared touch him. I returned to the garden. Terror, the great wolf, followed me like a dog. Outside the window, Terror heard Stannard's voice, and snarled in sudden inexplicable anger. I was forced to speak to him—to quiet him. The guilty pair heard and recognized my voice; Stannard proved the cad he was and attempted to escape, caring naught for the woman!"

Dr. Blackstone paused. It was so quiet in the little office of the coroner that one could count one's heartbeats.

"Gentlemen, I am taxing your patience; I must also tax your credulity. The great wolf suddenly broke from me, and running to the other side of the house, crouched in the shrubbery beneath a certain window.

"As Stannard's feet reached the ground I grasped his arm; he drew a weapon, but by superior strength I forced his arm upward and back and the weapon was discharged harmlessly. With my other hand I drove home in his left arm a hypodermic syringe filled with hyoscin. The man's muscles relaxed, he sank to the ground, unconscious. I gave the same dose to the great wolf, though it grieved me. I dragged them both to my operating room in a secluded building on my estate. I stole to my wife's room, and unheeding the whimpering fool, I overcame her frantic struggles with a powerful anesthetic.

"All through the night I labored with the three of them—the man, the woman, the great wolf. With diabolical skill I had not dreamed I possessed, I transformed the face of the man into the startling, frightful semblance of a wolf, grafting the skin of the head of that animal on his face. The lovely features of the woman I disfigured forever, giving her a twisted, horribly unnatural countenance,

the face of a satyr, and covered it also with the hair of the wolf.

"For weeks I kept these two confined, under the influence of a drug, until my terrible work was complete. Then, once again under anesthesia, I conveyed them to a room in a cheap lodging house, and left them, to awake in horror and consternation, to gaze at each other with loathing and fright, with hatred, with disgust."

Dr. Geoffrey Blackstone paused and again walked to the table with its gruesome object. Raising the cloth, he displayed the horrible features of the man-beast. A great, black, hairy head, cruel, staring slant-eyes, the long black snout, the gleaming teeth, gums drawn back in the last snarl of the Fiend of the Marsh. The head of a great black wolf glared at him, in wild but impotent anger, it seemed to the doctor.

The doctor suddenly replaced the cloth. He turned again to his audience.

"Gentlemen, that is all that remains of Graveland Stannard. As for the woman, I never saw, or heard of her, again. Just how Stannard arrived at the Haunted Marsh, and made his hidden lair therein, I can not explain; perhaps he came by way of the river, unseen."

Dr. Blackstone ceased speaking. His labored breathing was most audible. He was silent for some minutes, then spoke again. The even, slow tones of the scientist trembled; he labored under some marked excitement.

"There is one thing more I can not explain, for I do not understand it myself," he said nervously; "and that is, gentlemen, when I photographed the retina of the eyes of my dead child—murdered by yonder devil of my own creation—the plate printed most plainly the features of young Graveland Stannard, *just as he was before I disfigured him!*"

There was the stillness of death in the little room. The faces of his listeners were rigidly set.

Dr. Blackstone handed Coroner Timmins a photograph of the retina of the eyes of his daughter Lucille. This was passed by him to each man in turn. Each viewed it with startled amazement, for despite the cracks, the print showed most plainly and unmistakably the features of a dark, strikingly handsome young man, whose countenance so closely resembled that of the murdered girl that he would have been taken for a twin brother.

Those present in the little room were speechless. Filled with horror at the terrible confession of the doctor, the startling denouement rendered them almost incapable of thought.

Dr. Timmins broke the spell. He walked to the table, and raising the cloth from the face of the monster, viewed, with coldly professional eyes, the ghastly thing that lay there. "A most wonderful piece of work, doctor!" he said, admiringly.

None heard the valiant speech. Their puzzled brains were busy, struggling with the uncanny result of the unusual experiment in photography; the startling, supernatural thing the camera had done.

Dr. Blackstone picked up his coat and hat. "My revenge, gentlemen"—he seemed quite calm again, and his tones were cold and even—"acted as a boomerang: it came back to me, robbing me of my dearest possession, my daughter Lucille!"

The doctor left the room quietly.

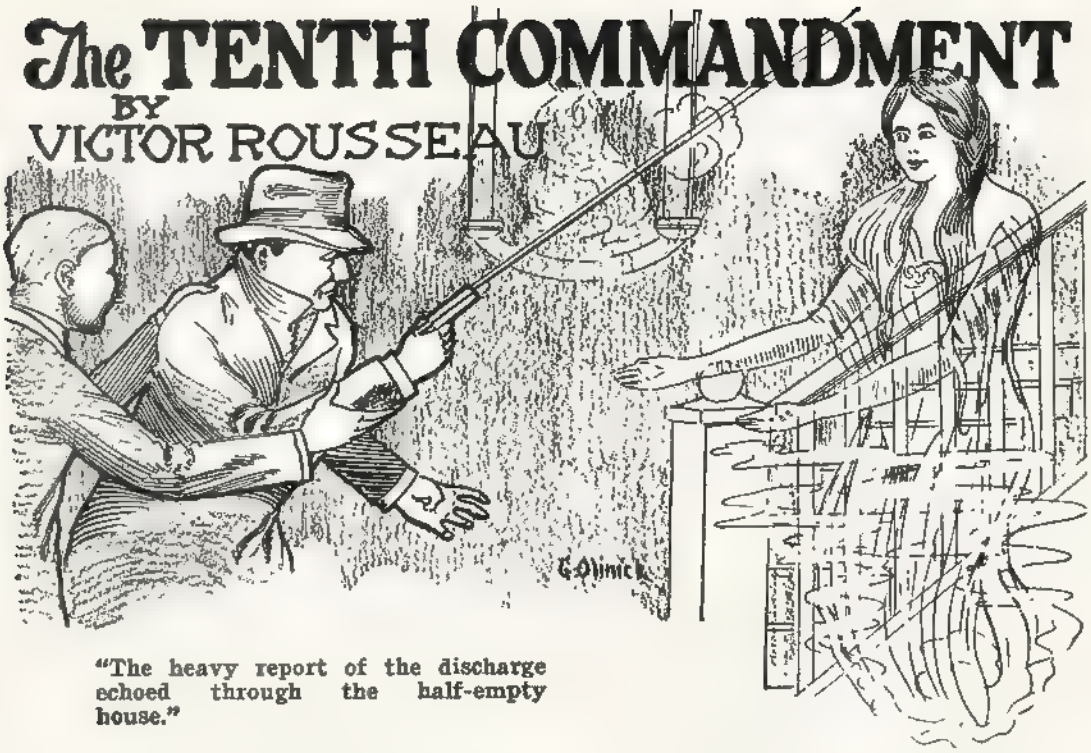
"My God!" said little Dr. Green, under his breath; "horrible!"

Slowly the men filed out of the little room.

The TENTH COMMANDMENT

BY

VICTOR ROUSSEAU



"The heavy report of the discharge echoed through the half-empty house."

THE one condition of Dr. Ivan Brodsky's psychical work that he found most burdensome was the constant requests that poured in upon him from innumerable people who had come to hear of him. On all sides he was beset by applications for assistance and advice in the solution of some problem which, while immensely increasing his reputation, left him little time for the prosecution of his investigations. He was forced to refuse many of these applicants, who, in return, denounced him as a charlatan. Brodsky received denunciation and praise with equal indifference.

By this time he had severed his connection with the hospital and devoted his time entirely to private practise among patients suffering from rare mental and nervous disorders. As an attached physician, he felt that the ethics of the profession excluded the use of non-recognized remedies. In private practise he felt free to make use of his knowledge of those spiritual causes which, he claimed, underlay all physical manifestations of disease.

One morning I found him in earnest conversation with a visitor, a young man of agitated aspect who, on seeing me enter, rose from his chair precipitately and prepared to take his departure.

"Don't go," said Dr. Brodsky; "allow me to introduce you to my secretary, who is my confidential assistant in these matters."

The young man, who was introduced to me as Mr. John Sykes, sat down again. His agitation was still more manifest; he stared around him as one bewildered.

"Now, Mr. Sykes, suppose you repeat your story," said Dr. Brodsky. "Begin at the beginning and don't leave out anything, even if it seems to you to be of trivial moment."

Note—This is the third of a series of stories, each one complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls."

"Well, sir," said the young man impetuously, "as I said to you at first, I am greatly in doubt whether this is a case for you or for a jury. But I wish to exhaust every possible remedy before taking the law into my own hands. Then, if I become convinced beyond all possibility of doubt that my wife is untrue to me, I shall put a bullet through my brother's head, and another afterward through my own."

"Which wouldn't help either of you in the least," replied Brodsky suavely. "You would find yourselves immediately transplanted into another not so very different world, with your enmity still at boiling point, but without the physical means of allaying it. Suppose you continue."

"My name, as I have said, is John Sykes," said the young man more calmly. "My brother Philip and I were the only children of our father and the inheritors of the Sykes estate. My father cut me out of his will on account of my marriage. My wife is a woman whom no man could feel ashamed of; my offense was that of having married without asking his consent. He was subject to fits of temper and changed his will. Had he lived he would undoubtedly have forgiven me. But unfortunately he died almost immediately afterward, leaving the Sykes mansion and grounds to Philip, while I was forced to continue the owner of a little cottage adjacent which I bought some years ago. Naturally, this caused an estrangement between my brother and me. I, myself, am happy enough in my cottage, and, until a few days ago, when I first doubted my wife's affection, no happier mortal existed. My wife, however, had always felt a sentimental regard for the old mansion. It would naturally have passed to us, Philip receiving an equivalent in cash. The disappointment has greatly affected her.

"Some weeks ago, my brother and I having then been estranged for several months, I surprized my wife one afternoon coming out of the mansion, where he was and still is living. You can imagine my consternation. My brother had already everything that I lacked save only her; was I to be bereft of her through any machinations of his to draw her within the sphere of his interests? I taxed her with visiting him; she admitted it and, weeping, explained that she had gone only to intercede for me. She wanted us to be friends, and, above everything else, she wanted Philip to sell us the mansion upon favorable terms, as he purposed traveling abroad and was not bound to it by any such intense attachment such as she had conceived. Philip had almost yielded to her request. I, however, am not of a temperament easily placated. I suspected that my brother was partly instrumental in the changing of our father's will. I refused to have any kind of dealings with him. I scolded her for visiting him, explained the misconstruction that might be put upon such an act by village gossip, and she promised me never to see him again.

"A few weeks ago I learned from servants' chatter that the Sykes mansion was reputed to be haunted by the spirit of a woman. The butler had told a village crony that the figure of a woman walked through the rooms and passages at night. He had seen it, had taken it for a sleep-walker and essayed to catch it, but it had vanished before his eyes and his hands had grasped only thin air.

"I am something of a student and often sit up alone all night with my books and papers. I am at present engaged in writing a monograph upon our American bats. Sometimes my observations take me away for a

day or two, so that my wife and I see not too much of one another. Indeed, of late, since the episode I referred to, we seem to have begun to drift apart. I am not a believer in the supernatural, and this foolish gossip of the butler aroused the most terrible suspicions in me. I resolved to discover for myself what truth lay in the rumor.

"Pretending to be about to set off on a two-day journey for the purpose of obtaining specimens, I came back at night and concealed myself in an old building, now unoccupied, but formerly used as a barn by my grandfather, adjoining the mansion. From here I was enabled to obtain a clear view of a large part of the interior, which is built in a rambling way and can in this manner be overlooked. I saw my brother lower the light in his study, and a minute or two later saw the lamp flash out in his bedroom. The lower portion of the house was plunged into darkness.

"It was past midnight. I was about to dismiss my project as a chimera, feeling much ashamed of my suspicions, when an irresistible impulse impelled me to go to the open window of the darkened study. Actuated by the same instinct which seemed to force me onward against my will, I crept in noiselessly, traversed the room, and emerged into the corridor. From the far end a veiled figure came gliding toward me. For a moment the eeriness of the situation, I confess, rooted me to the spot with horror. It came nearer; and suddenly I found myself looking into what I can swear was the face of my wife. Another moment, and the figure had passed me, with the same noiseless tread, and vanished into the distance.

"I do not know how long I remained there. When I came to my senses I was in my cottage, fumbling with a pistol. I dashed up to my wife's room and hammered violently upon the door. Suddenly she came out and confronted me. She was robed in a dressing gown and looked up with innocent, frightened eyes, as though just awakened out of sleep. I made no answer to her terrified appeals, but rushed out of the house and came straight to you, knowing that if there could be any supernatural solution of the difficulty you would put me out of my suspense. While the period between our encounter in the mansion and that in my own cottage seems almost too short to have enabled her to return and assume the rôle she played, I confess that I look upon you as the last possible refuge left me before I commit some act of desperation."

It was impossible not to be deeply impressed by the evident sincerity of the young man and by his deep distress. For my part, I was inclined to believe the worst. But a glance into Brodsky's impassive face convinced me that he did not share my suspicions. Brodsky's opinions of women were curiously fine; as I learned afterward, and hope subsequently to be able to tell, his life had been molded by one of the noblest characters, who had died before the day set for their marriage, leaving him to cherish her memory as a continual inspiration.

We determined to start at once for the village, which was some fifteen miles distant, situated in the heart of a sparsely settled farming country. It was decided, both in view of the young man's excited condition and in order to enable us to pursue our investigations freely, which conscience would not have permitted had we been the guests of Mrs. Sykes, that we should make our headquarters at the village inn, where Sykes was expecting to meet a man who might throw light upon the problem. We arrived there late in the afternoon and found the place empty of visitors, it being late in the fall. As we were seated in the spacious old-fashioned parlor,

an elderly man of consequential demeanor came softly and furtively up the back path. Sykes rose to meet him.

"Gentlemen, this is Jones, my brother's butler and an old employee of my father's," he said, rising dramatically and locking the door. "Now Jones, repeat what you told me yesterday."

"I've more to tell you since I saw you yesterday, Mr. John," said Jones huskily. He adopted toward the young man that mixture of patronage and servility which indicates, in a menial, the acceptance of some bribe in return for a dereliction of duty. "We saw her last night, sir. I thought I heard a burglar downstairs and dressed myself and went out to see. On the landing I met the master coming out of his room. He had heard the noise too. We went down softlike, and suddenly we saw her, as plain as life, coming along the passage."

"Who was she?" interrupted Sykes in a voice choking with emotion.

"That I wouldn't take it upon myself to say, sir," said the butler with a smirk. " 'Twasn't anybody I know, leastways, so far as I could tell by the walk, because she wore a veil and was all in white, which is a powerful disguiser for females, sir. So I says to myself: 'Jones, if the master chooses to have young female ghosts in his house at 2 in the morning, that ain't no business of yours.' So I turns to go back, and, while I was looking at her, she disappeared, right under my eyes."

Suddenly Sykes flew at the man like a deerhound and grasped him by the collar, shaking him furiously.

"You rascal, tell me who the woman was," he cried.

The butler's face turned purple.

" 'Twasn't anybody I know, sir," he gasped, breaking loose and reeling back against the wall. "I'll swear it wasn't any human living being, sir. She vanished right before my very eyes——"

Sykes stood off and looked at the man contemptuously.

"Jones," he said, "you are a dirty, lying hound. You told your cronies here that it was Mrs. Sykes."

The man began to tremble.

"You know me from old times, Jones," continued the young man more coldly. "You shall have one chance to prove your statement, and if you can't I'll shoot you like a dog."

"I swear"—the man began to babble—"I swear I told nobody. But it was her, Mr. John, and I can't lie to you. I'm willing to prove it and to stake my life on it."

"Jones," said the young man, "these gentlemen are friends of mine. At 10 o'clock tonight, or as soon afterward as the light goes out in your master's study, we shall be at the side door. You will unlock it and admit us to the empty picture gallery which commands a full view of the corridors. Here!" He took a roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off half a dozen. "Take this for your services. And if ever you say a word in the village——"

"Yes sir—yes, Mr. John," babbled the man, pouching the money with avidity. "I'll be there on time, sir." He turned and crept out of the room. Once outside, however, he gradually reassumed his jaunty demeanor.

When he was gone, John Sykes began to pace the floor with long strides. Brodsky and I watched him in silence. Presently he wheeled and came up to us.

"You see my wife's name has become a byword of village gossip," he exclaimed angrily. "Evidently in her infatuation she has lost all sense of fear. As likely as not she is even now planning a return trip to the mansion. I have no criticism to make of her," he went on brokenly. "It is my brother who has first robbed me of

my inheritance and then of the only woman I have loved. May they be accursed——"

"Stop!" said Brodsky, laying his hand restrainingly upon the young man's shoulder. "It will be time to accuse her when you know. At present you know nothing."

John Sykes looked at him incredulously.

"Do you mean—that there can be any hope?" he whispered hoarsely. "Do you think she is innocent?"

"I believe in all women as long as I can," said Brodsky simply.

Nevertheless, looking into his face, I read the struggle which he was undergoing against the weight of the evidence. And suddenly the young man collapsed into a chair and buried his face in his hands. He pulled a locket from his breast, opened it, and pressed his lips to the inside. Then he held it up to us.

"Look at it," he whispered. "Look at her face and say what you can read there."

It was the miniature of a young woman. She was strikingly beautiful, even in this land of beautiful women; but what held and fascinated the observer was the quality of innocence and purity that seemed to shine through the external features, as a light in a lamp. The artist had done his work surpassingly well. I stole a glance at Brodsky; his brow had cleared.

"I believe in her," he said again. "And I think before the night has gone your fears and doubts will have been dispelled. Courage, friend. And now let us have supper, for the physical condition has a powerful reaction upon the spirits."

It was a mournful supper in the deserted inn. Brodsky was at his best. He kept us amused with countless anecdotes of his own life. I had never known how much he had undergone, what he had seen, now tramping through Europe as a penniless student, now taking a leading part in the battle for Polish freedom; anon, imprisoned in the underground dungeon at St. Peter and St. Paul, escaping in a workman's clothes and working his way to America as a sailor under the noses of the Russian Marine officers. But, though once or twice our companion's face lit up and he smiled faintly, it was evident that he was almost overwhelmed by the tragedy that had come into his life.

No further reference was made to the engagement of the evening, but we sat there, smoking and talking, and listening to Brodsky, until ten strokes rang out from the old-fashioned clock in the corner. Then, with a deep sigh, the young man rose and led the way out into the darkness of the fall evening. At the end of the street the large bulk of the mansion appeared, cutting off the view beyond with its great mansard roof and outbuildings, of which the Sykes cottage seemed to form a part. Even as we looked, a light went out suddenly in a lower window, to reappear shortly afterward immediately overhead. The master of the mansion had retired to his room.

As we passed silently down the deserted street I caught the faint reflection from the light above the door of the inn as it struck upon some rounded, metallic thing which the young man was fingering. It was a pistol. On the way I contrived to snatch a fleeting word with Brodsky.

"Doctor," I said, "you are abetting a murder."

"No," he answered me, "I am saving a woman's name and her husband's happiness."

We halted at a side door and waited. After quite an interval the butler came out and admitted us. He led the way on tiptoe, we following with infinite precautions, along a corridor, up some carpeted stairs, and out upon the dimly lit circle of an

old picture gallery, where generations of the Sykes family looked gravely down from their heavily gilded frames. The sight aroused the young man to a frenzy of passion. This was the inheritance of which he had been defrauded! I saw him shake as with an ague, saw his fingers tighten convulsively upon the handle of his pistol; then I saw Brodsky's restraining arm encircle his shoulders and steady him. The little drama was enacted in perfect silence. We crouched down at the edge of the platform, below which we could see the passages of the rambling old structure radiating away on the three sides as spokes of a wheel. And we waited, shivering, there, none speaking, only gluing our eyes upon the distant end of the corridor which led toward the wing of the mansion which Philip Sykes occupied. The butler had slipped away, but John had forgotten him.

Eleven o'clock boomed out from a deep-sounding clock; the air grew chilly. I shivered. I looked at Brodsky. He was watching every movement of his patient, his hand, alert and sinuous, seemingly ready to leap forth to restrain him from any deed of rashness. But John was oblivious to both of us also; he fingered his pistol and knelt there watching, watching——

Crouching there, we three seemed to have become actors in some horrible drama that was being enacted for the benefit of those rows of silent ghosts, those family ancestors of dead and gone Sykes, looking out, starched and bewigged, from their gold frames, which were so faintly illuminated by the dull light of the low gas jets that the painted figures seemed to stand out as in a stereoscope, to have the verisimilitude of living men. I must have become half-hypnotized by the suspense of watching. My mind slipped away from the work that was at hand; I was living over my life in other places, thinking of the past, of the ambitions and aspirations with which I had started out on my career, of my strange meeting with Brodsky, of a thousand things——

SUDDENLY I felt Brodsky's fingers tighten upon my sleeve. I glanced along the distant corridor. My heart bounded in my breast and seemed to stand still. For there, emerging from out of the gloom, clothed in a misty garment, her head covered with a filmy veil, was a woman that glided toward us as no human, waking being moves, the eyes fixed and trancelike. For all the dimness and distance I knew her. It was the woman of the miniature. Brodsky recognized her, too, and the young man.

I saw his figure stiffen; every muscle in his body became as taut as steel. He crouched there, watching her, upon his face an aspect of horror and hatred terrible to witness. The figure approached us; now it was directly under us and had not seemed to notice us. Suddenly his hand shot out; I saw the gleam of the pistol. Then, still more quickly, I saw Brodsky's arm dart forward, and an instant later the heavy report of the discharge went echoing through the half-empty house, arousing a thousand echoes among the rafters.

I was upon my feet and Brodsky was pulling at my sleeve. "Follow me," he cried. "To the cottage!"

He dragged me after him, and the young man followed us. I moved as though in a dream, under Brodsky's compulsion; but, though we ran like the wind, John Sykes easily outstripped us. I knew what passion winged his speed. Overhead we heard noises and movement. Shouts were borne after us.

"This way," cried the doctor, as I halted, confused, in the middle of the winding galleries. He pulled me toward the door. Another moment

and we were outside, pressing the yielding turf beneath our feet. We ran around the house and darted toward the cottage, John Sykes ahead of us, the pistol still clenched in his hand. From the right we heard the sound of a man running. At the very door of the cottage Philip Sykes broke out upon us; and, as Philip drew back in amazement, John leaped at him, bearing him down upon the threshold, striving to free his right arm to gain pistol vantage. Philip perceived the peril and fought desperately for life; John's hand was upon his throat, his brother's grasp relaxed; another instant all would have been over. But even at the moment of his triumph he stopped and staggered backward. For the door had opened, and there, confronting us, fully attired, a lantern in her hand, her eyes wide with suspense and terror, was the lady of the miniature. And the three waited motionless as figures carved out of stone, till Brodsky stepped up and broke the silence. He took the pistol from John Sykes' unresisting hand.

"Let us go in and talk over the matter," he said.

If tears are akin to laughter, tragedy is surely akin to comedy. For hours, as it seems to me now, the four of them sat in the little cottage parlor, laughing incoherently, listening at first incredulously to the account that Brodsky unfolded. For the merest chance words let drop by John Sykes during their first interview had set him upon the track of his daring hypothesis, which he had courageously verified, even at the risk of murder. Afterward they began to believe, though I am not sure that Philip Sykes believes it yet; as for John, his joy at the restoration of his confidence in the lady drowned all baser emotions of rage or resentment. For, whatever other explanation there might have been, he knew that his wife could not possibly have been inside his brother's house in person, when she had met him at his own door.

"I was not sure until the end that my hypothesis was correct," said Brodsky. "But it was your statement of the sentimental regard which Mrs. Sykes felt for the old mansion, and her deep disappointment at the loss of it, that put me upon the track. Do you recollect the tenth commandment, which begins: 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house?' Many people have wondered at the inclusion of so comparatively—as it seems—venial a sin among those of theft and murder.

"Yet, like most things, that commandment exists with very good reason, for undoubtedly the Great Lawgiver was acquainted with the physical results of spiritual things. There was a ghost in the mansion." He turned to Mrs. Sykes. "Have you not dreamed of it continually?" he asked.

"Often and often," she answered.

"You were the ghost," said Brodsky. "It was you, who by the strength of your longing, were nightly transplanted there. You were there in spirit, but not in body, when we watched in the gallery. And had that pistol bullet pierced your ghostly form it would have killed you none the less surely, so intimately associated are the body and that psychical envelope which men miscall the soul, which is the body of desires and emotions. And unless you can overcome this longing, I confess I fear that you will continue to haunt the mansion."

"I shall haunt it no more," replied Mrs. Sykes, laughing. "My brother-in-law was willing long ago to dispose of it to my husband."

"Indeed, I have been most anxious to do so," said Philip. "But my brother, who has inherited the Sykes temper, refused all overtures for

reconciliation until your happy intervention this evening. But now I shall insist upon his taking the place off my hands upon any terms he will accept, for I confess I am a practical sort of man and don't want to be troubled by ghosts, even when they are the personal property of a very charming and newly-discovered sister-in-law."

Note.—The next story in this series, *The Legacy of Hate*, will be printed next month.

An Utterly Bizarre Story is

The Assault Upon Miracle Castle

By J. M. HIATT

"MEDIEVAL!" I exclaimed to my friend and host, Count Ramon de Nuñez, as we surveyed his estate from the tallest tower of his ancestral castle. "Nothing could be more medieval, even in Spain."

Don Ramon smiled with pleasure, for his hobby was the Middle Ages. "I grant that there is little of the modern in that landscape," he replied.

We were in east central Spain, in the province of Cuenca, the most thinly populated province of the most backward country in Europe. From the castle, which sat on an eminence, we could see the barren, rocky hill-land, rolling away to the horizon. Below us lay a narrow valley, cultivated, here and there, by methods as old as the Romans. A road, created by generation after generation of men and beasts, wound from the valley up to the castle. To this trail's exceeding roughness I could testify, having come over it the preceding evening in Don Ramon's automobile.

"Pardon my compelling you to view the countryside before breakfast," continued the count, "but I wished you to see it before the sun makes the battlements too warm to be comfortable. My ancestors established themselves here in 1177, when Alfonso the Eighth wrested the province from the Moors. Milagro Castle was long a fiercely contested spot on the frontier, and more than one attack was broken before these walls."

"The hand of Time seems to have rested lightly upon the fortress," I observed.

"Ah, Señor Hawthorne, it was a ruin long before we were born. The edifice which you see was built nine years ago, after I was lucky enough to make a little money in the Argentine. Still, I flatter myself that this is an exact reproduction of the old stronghold. If one of my forefathers were to ride up the road, I doubt if he could tell the difference until he had passed the gates."

"Not even then, perhaps," said I, recalling the heavy, rough-hewn fur-

niture, the beautiful tapestries, and the ancient armor and weapons which filled the chambers below us.

"You are too hard on my poor habitation," my host responded, laughing. "I admit that electricity and the telephone are lacking, but there are some conveniences here, among them breakfast. Shall we go down?"

We descended by means of several winding staircases of stone and were soon seated in the dining hall.

"*Milagro,*" I queried, over the repast, "that is the Spanish for 'miracle,' isn't it? A queer name, Miracle Castle."

"The place has been so titled since 1211, when the event occurred which gave rise to the name. The incident is the only thing of the supernatural of which my castle can boast, for, I regret to say, an appropriate ghost has yet to show itself. If you like, I shall read you the story, which the chronicler has told better than I can."

After breakfast, I followed the count to his study, where he found a parchment manuscript, written in Latin and with illuminated characters, which had faded with age.

"In the fifty-third year of King Alfonso, to whom may the saints grant blessed rest," translated Don Ramon, "the Moors, again waxing strong, began to fall upon the strong places and villages of the Castilians which were the nearest to them. The cursed unbeliever, Mozaffar of Murcia, having been supplied by the ameer, his master, with a numerous band, both horse and foot, marched swiftly upon the castle of Count Guillermo de Nuñez. Count Guillermo and the greater part of his fighting men were absent in the service of the king, and mighty was the terror among the people of the castle, and mighty was the eagerness of the enemies of God, who thought themselves sure of an easy victory. At this exceeding peril, Doña Jacinta, the wife of Count Guillermo, hastened with her daughters to the chapel and implored the aid of St. James.

"The prayers of the pious are strong, for, when the infidels were yet distant from the gates, a whirlwind came upon them, and they were never seen more. Neither man nor beast of them has since been discovered anywhere, but all doubtless burn in hell, whither the hand of Almighty God has hurled them.

"Wherefore, it has been ordered that the place shall henceforward be known as the Castle of the Miracle and that offerings shall be sent yearly to the shrine of Compostella, that this great mercy of Heaven may never be forgotten."

"A pretty fable," was my comment, "worthy to be placed beside any of the tales of the reconquest."

"I have often wondered if it is a fable," said the nobleman. Observing my incredulous look, he went on, "Don't misunderstand me. I believe I am as free from superstition as any man. But, Señor Hawthorne, are you not aware that, in our own time, there have been instances where persons or objects have disappeared in full sight of witnesses and in a manner which defies explanation? Einstein's work has thrown some light on the problem, and perhaps science may eventually answer our questions. One theory, often set forth, is that, as we live in a universe of three dimensions, so there are other universes based on different numbers of dimensions. They exist around us but in planes invisible to us. Occasionally, a part of one of these universes, how or why no one can guess, coincides temporarily with a spot on the earth. Then take place those sudden exits from our world to which I have referred and the entrance of strange beings and materials from out of the unknown.

"Other hypotheses have been

brought forward to explain these same phenomena, but they involve too much mathematics and physics for me to go into them.

"Now, it is not impossible that something of this sort happened to the assailants of Milagro, although one must admit that there is no other case on record where so large a number of persons disappeared at one time."

"Brr," I said, feigning a shudder, "you give me an uneasy feeling. I shouldn't care to fly off into another dimension."

"Don't worry," laughed Don Ramon. "By the laws of probability, there is scarcely more danger that such will be your fate than that you will be knocked on the head by a meteor."

THE conversation had drifted into other matters, when we were interrupted by one of the servants.

"*Señor,*" said the man, addressing the count in Spanish, "there is a crowd coming up the road."

"Tourists, likely, though—thank God!—this section is rarely troubled by the creatures."

"The *señor* may be right, but, from the dust they are making, there must be rather more of them than I had judged there were people in—begging the *señor's* pardon—in all this miserable province."

"Bah, Pablo! You are fresh from Madrid and have doubtless mistaken a shepherd and his flock for a crowd. Learn to use your eyes to better advantage and remember that, if you do not like the province, I am not interested in the fact."

I had gone to a window and now interrupted the dialogue. "The man is right," I said. "I can make out a number of people and horses, about two miles distant, I should judge."

Don Ramon picked up a pair of field-glasses and stepped to the window. "*Caracoles!*" he ejaculated. after a long look. "Take the binoculars, Señor Hawthorne, and see what you make of it."

I moved the glasses along the long array which was winding up the valley. Horsemen, in steel caps and shirts of mail and carrying shields, swords, lances, and bows, moved at the front and rear of the column and galloped here and there along the flanks. Infantry and pack-animals trudged in the center. Amidst the baggage I counted fourteen long and heavy ladders. Toward the front was carried a black flag, bearing a red design. The party must have numbered six or seven hundred men, many of whom were negroes.

"Were we anywhere near Hollywood, the capital of filmdom," I ventured at last, "such a sight would not be difficult to explain; but here——! Perhaps some of your friends in Madrid, knowing your enthusiasm for things medieval, have arranged a pageant to surprize you. They must have felt rich, if they hired that multitude."

"And, Señor Hawthorne, the mummers must have camped in the hills last night, for lodgings could not be found for them within a radius of forty miles. Let us go up where we can get a better view of this. Pablo, bring another pair of glasses, then keep at hand, for I may want you."

We climbed a watch-tower and were soon straining our eyes through the binoculars.

A few hundred yards ahead of the advancing throng, a man with an ox-cart had halted beside the road and was waiting excitedly for the parade to pass. Half a dozen riders, urging their mounts to a gallop, came rapidly upon him. Suddenly the peasant started to run, but they overtook him and smote off his head as he ran. I saw the frightful gush of blood and heard the yells of the horsemen.

"Some pageant!" I gasped.

From Don Ramon burst a savage

command. "Pablo, call all the servants together in the courtyard, and be quick, if you value your life!"

In a moment some twenty men had assembled in the designated spot, and Don Ramon, gesturing with a revolver which had appeared from nowhere, was issuing orders.

"Pedro and Pablo, see that both gates are closed. Then to the kitchen and do as Fernando tells you. Run, now! Fernando, you and the kitchen-boy carry all the food you can to the keep and don't forget a case of wine. Smith, to the stables and take Isabella and Ligero to the keep. Yes, lead them into the rooms! Leave the other horses. Take the dogs to the keep also. The rest of you, follow me!"

We dashed to the gun-room, where the count began to distribute rifles and pistols. I was sent to the tower over the study. "Don't show much of your person," was the final warning.

From my post I saw that the men on foot were still distant but that a swarm of riders was now tearing up the slope. As they neared the castle, they swung to the side and began to ride along under the walls, uttering savage cries. I was staring in amazement, when an arrow whizzing past my ear caused me to duck for cover. Angrily, I aimed through an archer's loophole and fired without success at a swiftly moving target. Trying again, I bowled a man from his saddle. Shafts were splintering against the stonework. Above the shouting, shots rang out. So great was the uproar and such the confusion in my own mind that I scarcely know what took place during those minutes.

At length a hand fell on my shoulder. I turned and saw Don Ramon.

"To the keep," he commanded. "The scaling parties will soon be here, and we are too few to hold the outer works."

"In God's name," I cried, as I followed him downstairs, "who are these people?"

"A proof of my contentions, Señor Hawthorne. These are the vanished Moors of the story."

"Impossible! That crew, if they ever existed, have been dead for centuries, while these are no ghosts, but living men."

"A thousand years in our universe might occupy but the fraction of a second in one of the other dimensions, and it is obvious that our callers do not consider themselves dead. If, as I believe, the miracle has been reversed and the old assailants of the place have come back in the way they went, it is possible that they are not conscious of any interim but still consider themselves good Mohammedan warriors of the year 1211."

We had now arrived at the keep, a massive tower over eighty feet in height, which rose from the courtyard in the center of the castle. Standing apart, it overlooked the circle of lower buildings and defenses and was designed as the last refuge of the garrison. It served Don Ramon as a sort of museum, in which were stored many antiquities. We passed through its pointed archway, and the heavy door was closed and barricaded. Here were gathered the count's servants, his dogs and favorite horses, food, drink, and ammunition.

"Better dress for the reception," grinned my host, pointing to several suits of armor. "These may help to keep out arrows."

I fumbled into a helmet and cuirass, but the master of Milagro clad himself from head to foot in steel, exhibiting a skill in so doing that made me suspect that he had often stolen up here to perform the feat. With his eyes flashing from excitement, he looked for all the world like one of the old-time cavaliers of Spain.

"What are you going to do with

that thing?" I asked, for the don had picked up a crossbow and was turning the crank which set the weapon.

He blushed and closed his vizor. "There aren't enough guns to go around, and I have always wanted to shoot one of these instruments."

"I'll bet it won't be the first time," I shot back.

At the instant a servant ran up. "Pepe is not with us!" cried the fellow. "I haven't seen him all morning!"

"Go out and find him," was the order.

"But, *Señor*, they are battering on the gates, and there is already a swarm on the roofs!"

"Too late, then!"

From a loophole I saw that, in several places, armed men were clambering over the outer battlements.

"You dare assail my castle, Allah-howling dogs!" thundered Don Ramon. "Back to the other world, you sons of Satan!"

So saying, he discharged his crossbow; the bolt struck through a warrior and sent him rolling down a roof to fall clanging upon the courtyard. A hot fire burst from the keep, but the shooters were far from marksmen and greatly excited. As targets multiplied, hits grew more plentiful. The effect of firearms seemed to amaze our antagonists, but, contrary to my expectations, it only aroused them to greater activity. Arrows began to reply to our bullets and to the bolts of Don Ramon. A formidable force was gaining a foothold in the castle.

Suddenly the main gate gave way, or was opened from within, and a flood of fanatical fighters swept into the courtyard. A bearded horseman, flourishing a long, curved sword and clad in golden armor, directed the mob. With a heavy beam they began to batter the door of our stronghold. Ladders were being brought to set against the lower windows.

A heavy object fell past my station and smashed on the pavement below. It was a carved cabinet, under the wreckage of which now lay several broken forms. The men at the top of the keep were throwing down Don Ramon's most cherished possessions.

"This *is* desperate," screamed the count at my elbow, but whether he meant our situation or the despoilment of his museum, I know not.

Furiously he cranked his crossbow, leveled, and let fly. The leader on horseback sagged and fell from his saddle, his gold-covered breastplate useless against the short, iron bolt, which had almost the force of a bullet. At the death of the Moor, the attack grew more frenzied than ever.

The gun-barrel scorched my fingers. Pablo lay near me with a shaft through his brain. The fire of the defense grew weaker and weaker, as the archers killed the riflemen. The door would soon splinter under the blows of the ram. Climbers were already mounting, holding their shields above their heads.

Suddenly an automobile siren pierced the tumult, and a big car tore out of one of the buildings. At the wheel was a fellow, who, as I learned later, was the missing Pepe, his face convulsed with terror. He had sneaked away from his duties to take a siesta in the garage and had failed to awake till the horde broke into the castle. To save his life, he made a desperate break for the gateway, but his path was so packed with humanity that he abandoned the design. Spinning the wheel this way and that, with horn screaming and cut-out open, the frantic driver tore round and round the courtyard. Dozens, too appalled to flee, were run down. A few ill-aimed arrows were the sole resistance to the monster. The stampede which began at the car's first appearance lasted until all of the enemy who could run were in

wild flight down the hillside. Pepe finished his work by hurling the vehicle through a stone wall into the kitchen.

Ascending to the top of the tower, I watched the retreat. My brain was beginning to clear, and I could hardly believe that what had happened was true, much less the count's explanation of it.

Suddenly a whirlwind passed along beside the fugitives. It was a small twister, such as might carry away a handkerchief or a straw hat, but—— I rubbed my eyes. There lay the same barren and deserted landscape upon which I had looked that morning. The multitude had vanished.

Hastening to the courtyard, I found Don Ramon.

"They're gone," I cried, "swallowed up, every last one of them!"

He showed but little interest. "Señor Hawthorne," he said, "today I have lost a Byzantine cabinet of the Tenth Century, and other treasures of which I can not bear to think."

"To say nothing of half your household and an automobile," was my rejoinder, "but you have certainly added to your stock of medieval weapons. There is enough Saracen armor lying around to fill a dozen castles."

My host shook his head. "Crude, common stuff, all of it, except one fine coat of gold-plated mail, which I unhappily perforated."

Soon afterward I left Milagro Castle, accompanied by the surviving servants, who swore they would no longer remain in that place. We followed a precipitous path over the hills, for none of us had any confidence in the regular road. Perhaps it still led into another universe!

The other day a letter came from Don Ramon, saying that he had cured a number of the wounded warriors, had trained them as servants, and had taught them Spanish. He invited me to come and converse with some men of the Thirteenth Century. The next time I go to Europe, I may accept his invitation.

FOR CLYTIE

By BINNY KORAS

There's a night somewhere
  With moon of beryl hue,
Red stars, xanthic stars, jet stars, too,
  In a bowl of livid blue—
A night that we could revel in
  As puppy foxes do.

Low, weird whisperings,
  An odor dank and cool,
Velvet moths with pansy wings,
  A tarnished copper pool—
Where all the shades go reveling,
  The ghost of every fool.

Here Are the Closing Chapters of

ACROSS SPACE

A Three-part Serial

By EDMOND HAMILTON

The Story So Far

A GREAT red ray of light stabs across space toward Mars, from the crater of Rano Kao volcano on Easter Island, carrying with it the magnetic force of Earth's northern magnetic pole against the southern magnetic pole of Mars. The red planet is pulled from its orbit and hurtles straight toward Earth.

Dr. Whitley and Professor Allan try to save the Earth from destruction, but are captured by the bat-winged men from Mars who live in the crater of the extinct volcano, and are carried to their city in the bowels of the Earth. There they learn the details of the Martians' scheme from Dr. Holland, who has been captured years before. The captives plan to escape from their guards (strange, mechanically constructed creatures created by the bat-winged Martians), in a desperate attempt to save the Earth. If they fail—and the chances are a million to one against them—in a few days the atmosphere of Mars will touch that of Earth, and the world will be overrun by Martians flying from their planet to Earth, armed with a crumbling ray to destroy humanity.

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I WAS awakened by a slight shaking of my shoulder, and opened my eyes to see that both Whitley and Holland were sitting beside me, earnestly regarding me. When he saw that I was awake, Whitley spoke in a low whisper.

"Holland has a plan by which we can get out of here," he told me, "and it sounds like a good one to me. But I will let him tell you." And he motioned to his friend.

All attention now, I listened to Holland's idea, a scheme that was so daring that it seemed to leave me breathless.

"It is simple enough," he said, "but I think we three can swing it. As I told you, these slave-monsters, like the two that guard us, are controlled entirely by telepathy, and never receive a spoken command. They receive orders from any distance on thought-waves from their masters, and their brains retain those orders, and act on them, until they are erased by new ones, from those same masters. Now I have long experimented with them, throwing commands at them in my thoughts, and have found that they respond a little, though very little.

"The reason I can't make them obey my orders totally is simply that my own power of telepathy is far beneath that of the Martians, and so the orders I give them are too weak to cause them to obey. Of course, the Martians don't know that I, or you either, have any power or conception of telepathy at all, for if they did they would certainly never leave us in the sole care of these creatures.

"So this is my plan. If we all three concentrate on our two guards, who are somewhere in this building, and order them, by telepathy, to come and release us, I think that our accumulated thought-power will be enough to impress their brains with this order, and overrule the order given them by the Martians, to keep us confined. If we can just get them to open the door for us, you two can try to make your way to the tube down which you came, and get up to the crater. Then there is a million to one chance, as I said, that you can do something there to save the Earth.

"My idea is to wait until an hour before midnight, for then all of the Martians are going through their ceremonies in the great temple, and every one of them is in the temple at that time, so they will not be able to molest you, going through the city to the tube entrance. In the meantime, I will try to hold our two guards here by my command, thus giving you a chance to escape."

"But we can't leave you here!" both Whitley and I cried, nor would we consent to try his plan until he promised to let us take him with us. At last he gave in, and we planned to carry him to the tube with us.

It was then 7 o'clock in the evening, just twilight in the world above, but we knew the time only by our watches, for here it was day, as always. The hours before 11 I spent in desultory fashion, and regretted as I watched Whitley carefully cleaning his automatic, that my own had been lost as I was carried down into the crater. Why the Martians had not taken the weapon from him, I did not understand, but supposed that they had not conceived us as being able to make and use any very dangerous weapon. I was partly consoled for the loss of my pistol, though, when Holland produced from under his clothing two long, wicked-looking knives of Martian manufacture, which he said he had concealed for a long time. With one of these in my belt I felt armed, at least.

Slowly, dragging ever more slowly, the hours passed by, until it was a few minutes after 11 and we were listening intently for the chanting in the temple which would indicate that the Martians had gathered there, before ascending above.

Finally it came, a low, solemn chant that sounded through the dead city like a dirge, the same as that which we had heard in the crater, the deep, mournful hymn of the last few thousand of a mighty race. We could still hear outside the sound of the tireless slave-creatures going to and fro, but there was no sound of flapping wings, and we knew that the time for the trial of our mad plan had come.

So, at Holland's whispered directions, we sat and silently concentrated our minds on the two creatures who guarded us, somewhere in the building. We sent the same message to them over and over, hurling it out in powerful mind-waves, ordering them to come and open the door, to release us. Yet no response came after five minutes of steady concentration, and we broke down and spoke to each other in despair.

But Holland kept at us, and said, "Don't let a single thing get into your mind but the one thought, the one order that they are to release us. And when we get out, if we do get out, for God's sake hold that thought in your mind as long as we are down here, for as soon as we stop sending them the order to let us go where we want, that moment the order of the Martians will assert itself in their minds and we shall have them rushing after us at once."

So we again began our concentration, and though the minutes seemed flying now, that had dragged before, we let none of our despair creep into our thoughts but focused our minds on the two things that guarded us, bidding them to come and open the door, to let us go.

I saw the sweat standing out on Whitley's forehead, and just as I thought that we all must break under the enormous strain we were undergoing we heard a soft pattering of feet at the farther end of the corridor, slowly approaching us. The things were coming at our order!

When we realized that, exultation rushed over us, and we bent all our mental force on the two, making our order imperious, impatient, commanding! And they came nearer

and nearer until they were standing outside the door, when we instantly focused all our thoughts on them with the message that they must open the door and let us depart from the building.

For a moment, my heart was in my throat, then there was a grating sound as the bar was lifted, and the door swung open. At a sign from Holland, we reached and picked him from the floor, and carrying him between us, passed out the door, being careful to utter no sound and to keep our thoughts focused on the two monstrous guards, who stood aside from the open door.

With unsure, hesitating movements, the two things moved out of our path and allowed us to proceed down the corridor. We could still hear the chanting from the temple, but we knew that we had but little time left if we were to ascend to the crater before the Martians. At the point where we left the corridor and stepped into the street outside, we almost met disaster, for Whitley and I stumbled on the sill of the entrance and during the moment that we struggled to regain our balance, we completely forgot the two things behind us.

Instantly there was a flashing movement in the corridor, and a swift sound of padding feet as they raced down toward us! But when only a few feet away, they stopped, and seemed to regard us in a puzzled manner, unsure, perplexed. At the very last second we had thrown out our thought-command for them to halt, but it had been a close call. We knew now why Holland had warned us to keep our thoughts on the creatures until we had completely left this place.

So, carrying Holland up with us, we proceeded up the long street, still with our minds focused on the two guards in the building behind, bidding them stay there. We spoke no word as we walked along, and I regretted that we had not locked the things in our own cell, then conjectured that possibly Holland had not suggested it because of their own telepathic powers, by which they might have sent some warning to their masters of our escape. With a start, I realized that I was allowing my thoughts to wander, and again centered them on our unspoken command to our late guards.

All the way through the city we saw not one Martian, and it was evident that even as Holland had said, they were gathered in the temple for their own ceremonies. The chanting had ceased now, and I knew that it must be almost half past 11, leaving us less than a half-hour to get to the crater before the Martians.

As before, there were many of the slave creatures in the streets, but none offered to stop us, or even seemed to notice us. They seemed entirely unaware of our presence, for each had its own task to do, implanted in its brain by its Martian master, and each could perceive only its own particular business. After all, specialization has its drawbacks.

And now the long building in which lay the tube's entrance came into view, and we hurried toward it, our hearts beating high with the success we had already achieved.

THERE was no one at all in the building, and I made directly for the switch in the wall. When I pressed it, the circle of the wall's surface slid back, revealing behind it the long, hollow cylinder. It was the same down which we had come, for I had noticed that it was the nearest to the door of the building. How many of the tubes they had in operation, I did not know, but all along the long, low wall I saw the same kind of switches inset, doubtless controlling similar cylinders.

As we were just about to enter the

cylinder, Holland pointed to a corner of the room and said, "We must have three of those before we go up. They may save us at the top."

I looked in the direction he pointed and saw only a number of loose garments of a pale yellow material that were hanging on hooks in the wall. At my questioning look, Holland said, "They are really suits of armor, made by the Science Council for the protection of the guards of the disk. They will turn any kind of ray, and without them we have no chance of getting into the switch-box above. See, they are a complete covering."

He extended one to show us the hood that fell over the face, and the way in which the robe buttoned to protect all of the body, though they were intended for the winged Martians and were far too roomy for us.

I hastily grasped three of them and we were reaching down to pick up Holland from the floor, when we heard a sound that sent a chill through our hearts. What was that, that soft, racing pattering that seemed to be rushing up the street outside, toward us?

There was a sudden wail from Holland. "The slave-monsters!" he cried. "We forgot them and they're coming." Then, as I made to pick him up and rush for the cylinder, "Too late!" he cried.

I had just time to draw my knife when the two creatures appeared in the doorway and rushed straight at us. I was thrown toward one side of the room by the impact of one of them hitting me, then, as I rolled about in its powerful grasp, I stabbed out savagely with the knife, plunging the long blade into the slimy body time after time.

Yet it seemed unaffected and it whirled me about the room as a child would a toy, and I had a momentary glimpse of Whitley, with arms and legs clasped around the other thing and stabbing it repeatedly in the back with the knife Holland had thrown to him, while the creature squirmed and tore under him with tremendous force.

I heard Holland crying, "Stab at the black spot!" But before I could again raise my blade it had been jerked out of my hand by a sudden blow on the arm and I rolled over on the floor with the monster, weaponless. The smooth, powerful arms were being coiled around my neck, and my frantic struggles were growing less, for I was being slowly choked to death. I heard a sudden savage yell from Holland, and the next instant the thing that held me gave a convulsive movement, while the limbs that were choking me loosened. I heard the thud of soft flesh hurled against the wall, then staggered to my feet and looked about me in horror.

A few yards away sat Dr. Whitley, his knife buried to the hilt in the oval dark spot of one of the monsters, which lay motionless beside him. And near by was the one I had struggled with, with a great gash in that same spot, and my knife lying near by. And Holland was lying crumpled up in one corner of the room, where that last tremendous convulsion of the thing that was choking me had hurled him, when he stabbed it in its only vulnerable spot, the seat of its queer intelligence.

We dropped beside him, and he opened his eyes slowly, then smiled. "The end for me," he said, still smiling. Then, seeing the tears that welled up in my eyes, he said, "Don't cry, lad; do you think I wanted to live the way I am? Go on, go on up to the crater! Strike back from the disk——"

His voice stopped, with a sudden intake of breath, and he slumped down and lay silent. Across his body Whitley and I stared at each other and I saw the tears in my own eyes reflected in his. Yet he was the first

of us two to rouse himself to what lay before us.

"We must hide these before we go," he said, motioning to the bodies that lay around us.

So we gathered together the three bodies, and taking them outside the building, laid them on the farther side of the edifice, so that they would not be noticed by anyone entering the building. Already it was twenty minutes to 12, and I wondered if we had time to do anything, even if we could win to the crater's bottom.

Hastily we entered the cylinder, not forgetting the yellow robes which had brought disaster on us, and once secure in two of the swinging seats, I gingerly pressed the studs as Holland had instructed us, snapping shut the circle of wall behind us and leaving us in darkness once more. Another stud pressed, and the cylinder tilted again to a steep slant, and when I snapped open the last switch, we pressed down against our seats with tremendous force, while all around the cylinder rose the humming shriek of wind we had noticed when we descended. As we rocketed up at unthinkable speed, I wondered if the cylinder stopped automatically when it reached the end of the tube, then concluded that it must have been so constructed, since there was no gage or anything else in the cylinder to tell how near it was to the end.

I saw the radium dial of Dr. Whitley's watch glowing in the darkness, and noted that it lacked but fifteen minutes of midnight, and from that I judged that we must be very near the surface, as it had taken us but five minutes to descend before, and we had already been in the tube almost that long. My judgment was correct, too, for even as I saw the little illuminated circle of the watch vanish, as he closed it, the humming wail outside diminished in volume to a whisper and finally died, and the cylinder came softly to rest in a horizontal position.

Instantly I had the end of it opened, and we stepped out into the same building we had entered on our trip down. Striding to the open door, we both stood for a single moment surveying the beauty of the night, a beauty a thousand times intensified to us by our hours of imprisonment in the underworld.

The stars above were blazing in all their tropical splendor, but they were dimmed to tiny sparks by the immense blood-red disk of Mars, directly above our heads, a disk that was as large as the full moon's, a tremendous crimson shield that was tipped at each of its ends by a circle of white, the realms of ice that cover the poles of Mars. Certainly in the twenty-four hours we had been underground the planet had increased tremendously in size, and I realized that it must have been falling toward us with even greater speed than the astronomers had calculated.

For only a second we gazed at it, then, clumsily wrapping ourselves in two of the yellow robes, we looped the hoods over our faces, and stole out toward the disk, seeing everything about us but dimly in the lurid light, and through the half-transparent material of the robes' hoods.

We could see no living thing as we stealthily made our way to the disk, and evidently all of the Martians were still collected in the temple far below, but it lacked but ten minutes of midnight, and I knew that at almost any second they would be streaming up the tubes toward the crater. And it would be short shrift for us, then.

We hurried swiftly across the crater, until we stood in the shadow of a small building, near the pillar that upheld the square switchbox. From the slots and openings of that box, light streamed out, and ever and

again the light was blocked by the two guardians inside crossing the openings. The globe on top of the box was not illumined, and we could see but little of the crater's surface.

It was now or never, though, so with his pistol ready Dr. Whitley walked swiftly toward the pillar and I followed, with knife clutched tightly in my hand. The hooks set in the pillar's sides were close enough together so that we could easily use them to climb up to the box at the top, and we started up the side, Whitley leading. Up and up we climbed, a prayer in our hearts, and were half-way up to the switchbox when a square section of the floor of that structure was suddenly jerked aside and a thin, cruel face looked down at us.

For a moment, I think, the Martian who looked down on us must have thought us two of his own kind, muffled up in the robes as we were, and while he hesitated, we had come to within ten feet of the box's floor. Then he disappeared for a moment, and jerked back into view with a long metal tube that he pointed directly at us.

A blinding blue light sprang from the tube's end toward us, and striking us, flowed over our garments like water over a raincoat. Had it not been for the yellow robes, we had been crumbled to a white smear of powder in an instant; but wrapped in them, we never felt the deadly ray. Before the Martian who held the tube could move back from the opening, Whitley's automatic barked, and the creature slumped back into the switchbox with a bullet in his head.

Surmounting the last few hooks in the pillar, Whitley pulled himself up through the opening, and as I leaped after him I saw him close in battle with the other Martian. I wondered why he did not use the pistol on the creature, but a flashing glimpse of the intricate switchboards and machinery about us told me that he feared to fire lest his bullet loose some of the tremendous forces that were centered in this spot.

As he tossed back and forth in the little room with the Martian, I sprang behind and sank my knife deep between the creature's shoulders, and was instantly knocked to one side by the wild beating of the thing's great wings, that flapped for a moment convulsively as the creature fell in his death throes. Standing over the two dead Martians, we looked dumbly at each other, wild and disheveled, then turned to an examination of the apparatus that lined the sides of the little room.

From the center of the floor rose two thick cables, covered with a smooth, black insulation, that led to and disappeared behind a square switchboard on one side of the room. In the very center of this board were two large round knobs, each the size of a small orange, one of a vivid red color and the other bright green.

Whitley examined these closely, and said, "There is no doubt but that these are the switches that control the two rays. You remember what Holland said, the attractive ray is red and the repellent ray is green. I take it that the ray is turned on by pulling the knob out toward one, as they don't seem to move in any other direction. The farther the knob is pulled out, the more powerful the ray sent out. At least I would think so."

"But the time!" I cried. "How will we know when to send out the green ray? It can only be shot out at the exact moment when Mars' south pole is crossing its path."

"The bell, the bell," he countered. "Didn't you hear Holland say that the third stroke of the bell is the exact instant when the ray is to be turned on? And those bell-notes are sounded by other Martians, on the other side of the disk."

"I remember now," I told him;

"yet what of the Martians while we are sending out the green ray? Surely they won't stand by and see us undo all their work without interfering? And they will be here almost any moment now!"

He watched me for a second without answering. "There is our stumbling block," he said, "and only you can overcome it, Allan."

"I!" was my astonished exclamation. "What can I do?"

He explained swiftly. "If you could get to the top of the crater, by means of that big crack in the wall you mentioned, you could get down to the plane and fly back over the crater. I can send out the green ray at the proper time, and then I am sure that I can stand off the Martians for a time, at least. I have this, you know," and he gestured to the metal tube on the floor, the container of the crumbling ray.

"At least I feel that I can hold them off until you and Rider can fly back over the crater, when you can drop enough bombs on the disk to put it out of commission. They don't seem to know much of high explosive and its effects, and I think that I could use their moment of panic to descend from this box and get to the crater's top. Then we can do our best to seal the entrances of the tubes with high explosives, and at the worst, we can leave the island and come back with aid to do it."

I protested that I would not leave him, but the force of his reasoning overcame my objections, and I prepared to go, unwillingly enough. He scribbled a few words on a sheet torn from his note-book, then folded it and handed it to me, asking me to give it to the pilot, and I thrust it into my pocket.

Stepping over the dead Martians, I lowered myself through the opening in the floor, but when I was half-way through the opening, I stopped and extended a hand to Whitley, who shook it in a silent grasp. No words we said, but all the way down the pillar I could see his gentle face above, watching my progress. As I stepped to the ground, he waved his hand in a gesture of good-will and farewell, and then snapped shut the opening in the floor, evidently turning his attention to the things in the switchbox. And immediately I started to run across the surface of the crater toward the crack in its wall, expecting every moment to hear the sound of the Martians emerging from beneath, for it was almost midnight.

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Across the great crater I ran, and sobbed with relief when I reached its eastern wall. Along that wall I raced, until I stood at the lower end of a crack I had noticed, a colossal slanting crevice that reached to the very top of the volcanic pit. I was just starting up this, when the globe of blue light on top of the switchbox flashed out, illumining the crater with its thin wavering light. I knew that Whitley had turned it on, and I knew too that it was a sign that the Martians had reached the crater from their world far beneath, so I prayed that they might not notice me as I scrambled up the giant crack.

Up I went, clambering, climbing, bruising myself on the sharp lava, and I was half-way up the crater's wall before the first bell-note rang out. It rolled up toward me in a thick wave of beating sound, and I half stopped for a second, to look behind.

The Martians were clustered thickly around the great disk, and I saw that they were evidently contemplating the huge, crimson planet that hung directly above. I glanced at it too, as I clawed my way upward, and in my heart prayed that Holland had been right in estimating the

power of the green ray to throw the planet back.

Again the bell sounded, and by now I was very near the volcano's top, though it was hard for me to judge my position. The chanting began, swelled out, and died away, and as it began again, my hands gripped the very top edge of the crater's wall, and I pulled myself up and lay for a minute, exhausted and breathless.

The third note of the great bell clanged, and I turned swiftly toward the crater, just in time to see a blinding shaft of green light stab out from the disk's surface into the zenith, a column of emerald fire that was the essence of all green, as the red ray had been the seeming essence of that color. It was the defiance, the answer, of Dr. Whitley! And of the Earth!

There was no triumphant chanting now! A loud humming reached my ears, as of a hive of bees disturbed, angry, menacing. I could see the crowds of Martians swarming wildly about the pillar and the box it supported. As a number of them began to climb up the pillar, the blue ray of death flashed out from inside the box and cut a wide swath through their numbers, reducing those it touched to white powder in an instant!

I saw, too, why the hooks on the pillar had been used to enter the box, instead of the Martians' wings, for several of the Martians who flew up toward the box ventured too close to the disk, and were instantly flashed into nothing by the green ray, the awful concentrated power of Earth's southern pole!

I looked up at Mars and then shouted aloud with exultation, for on its white-tipped southern pole a tiny spot of brilliant green stood out like a dazzling emerald. Another glance at the hordes of Martians swarming about the pillar, and I remembered my own mission and turned and sped down the volcano's slope toward the shore. I was half-way down the slope when the green ray snapped out behind me.

But I knew that its work was done! Dr. Whitley had flung the full force of the repellent ray against the nearing planet, and if we could destroy the disk now, there would be no danger of the Martians attracting it again with the opposite ray.

As I ran I could still hear the angry humming from the crater, and I hoped fervently that we could get back to the volcano in the plane soon enough to save Dr. Whitley.

I had almost reached the volcano's bottom when a mighty convulsion shook the whole island to its foundations, throwing me violently to the ground, while a wave of scorching, stifling heat rolled down over me from the crater above.

I jumped to my feet and looked behind me, then stood petrified by the sight that met my eyes. For a vast fountain of green and crimson fire seemed to be shooting up from the crater's interior, whirling, brilliant rays whose electric force I could feel even where I stood, and whose intense heat made it almost impossible for me to breathe.

A moment the crater continued thus, a whirlpool of released electricity, then the whole sides, the great walls of the crater crashed down into it, burying all in it under thousands of tons of rock. And I knew what had happened! I knew!

Whitley had turned on both the attractive and repellent rays at the same time, and even as Holland had predicted, the effect of that concentration of all Earth's magnetic power in one spot, that colossal magnetic short-circuit, had been to snuff out all life in the crater like a moth in a candle, and to rend the volcano itself like an ant-hill.

I remembered the note Whitley had given me, and I opened and read it

by the lurid red light of the planet above, and even as I had expected, it was written for me, and not the pilot.

"Dear Allan," ran the hastily scribbled words, "when you read this I shall not be living, for I have resolved to wipe out these Martians once and for all in the way Holland suggested, for if I do not, they will surely continue to plot against the Earth. To accomplish this, I must die myself, but you need not, so I am sending you on a false errand for your own sake, since you would not leave me if you knew the truth. One man's life is a small price to pay for the life of a world, and I pay it gladly. I have no time to write more. Good-bye, Allan!"

So the note, and as I read it the tears streamed down my face. And as I ran on down the slope, between the dark, giant statues, my tears were still falling and I saw but dimly through them the white, anxious face of Lieutenant Rider, as he ran toward me. Then, for me, came a merciful unconsciousness.

EPILOGUE

TODAY, at the very tip of the Golden Gate, there stands a colossal statue, the figure of a thin, kindly man who gazes ever south across the Pacific. Never a steamer passes out the bay but salutes it with screaming whistle; and when the great liners slip past, the gay chatter on deck halts, and there is a moment's tearful silence that is a reverent memory of the man whose effigy it is. For he saved our world.

One hand of that statue is flung up toward the heavens in a superb gesture, as if pointing to the tiny, gleaming speck that is Mars at night, a Mars that we can hardly see now. And it was that hand that hurled the planet back into space, back so far that it fell into the attraction of Jupiter, and now circles that giant world forever as a moon, never again to be a menace to us.

Only today I stood at the foot of that great figure, the testimony of a world's gratitude, and looked out over the gray ocean with it, seeing in my mind's eye the lonely little island, and the strange world far beneath it, where three men strove against the creatures of hell who would have wrecked this Earth. Three men! One of them lies in the strange, dead city of the Martians, a city dead forever, now; and another, who is now the world's greatest hero, rests beneath the shattered ruins of Rano Kao; and I, the last and least of the three, stand beneath the statue of my friend, thinking, remembering.

On Easter Island there are statues standing, too, but the last remnant of the race that carved them is gone now, buried in the same tomb as their destroyer. The long ages passed, the year, the day came that saw that race almost triumphant, almost supreme; then, at the last moment, their work, their evil plans, themselves, were dashed down to nothingness by the hand and heart and great soul of one man. But, not knowing this, the statues on the grassy slopes still gaze expectantly out to sea.

[THE END]

The DOG-EARED GOD

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.

"Then a deluge of colored fire shot out of the creature's nose and mouth."

The Egyptians' gods are shaped like beasts, but why they represent them in this way I had rather not mention.—*Herodotus.*

WHAT do you think of it?" asked Professor Dewey."

The colossal height of the mummy case accentuated my friend's littleness. Somehow (I don't know why the image should have presented itself) I thought of the opium-haunted De Quincey walking wearily about the streets of London, a grotesque little midget in carpet slippers who carried a world within his head. Professor Dewey bore an amazing resemblance to De Quincey. His forehead was high and shrunken, and covered with wrinkles, and the skin on his lean cheeks was stretched as taut as yellow parchment. His nose could scarcely be described as Roman: it was so excessively Hebraic that a strain of Jewish blood unquestionably formed a measure of his heritage. His smile, when he did smile, was grim and lifeless; and very few people would have been attracted to him. But beneath his almost repulsive exterior the little chap had a good heart, and I found his companionship delightfully stimulating.

Professor Dewey's hobby was Egyptology, and he imported large quantities of mummies annually, and I am sorry to add, illegally. No prying customs officer ever laid his sternly official hand on one of Professor Dewey's acquisitions. No blue-eyed and impertinent government clerk ever questioned Professor Dewey as to the value of his queer and often repulsive property. The professor had made arrangements with a dozen sly and secretive skippers whose Levantine dealings were seldom above reproach, and as a result of his careful bargaining he never lost a mummy or scarab or precious stone. In the course of a single year eighty-three mummies had been successfully smuggled into his stately brownstone mansion on Riverside Drive.

We stood in Professor Dewey's mummy-room, a great hall carpeted

with red velvet and lined with rather sinister black curtains. It seemed ridiculous to me that the professor should furnish this repository with the trappings of occult melodrama, but I have always been singularly incapable of fathoming my friend's amusing whims. Beneath his whimsicality and eccentricity he was reasonably genuine, and it is unfair to expect common sense or restraint from a man of genius.

The mummy before us was unusually tall. It fairly towered in the yellowish gloom of the great room, and it bore unmistakable characteristics of great age. And it was oddly shaped—its breast swelled out curiously and its nose was gigantic. Indeed, the latter member almost protruded through the aromatic and evil-smelling wrappings. "An Egyptian Cyrano," I remarked, and permitted a grin to disturb my usually severe and solemn features (the professor often assured me that my features were severe, and being a very young man I took pardonable pride in the fact!). "How the ladies must have hated him!" I added, seeing my friend scowl.

"This is a serious matter," he said after a pause that seemed interminable. "Nothing like this has ever come out of Egypt. I—do—not—like—it!"

My friend's voice was distressingly hollow. It made me nervous, and I endeavored to quiet him. "There is nothing very unusual about this mummy," I replied. "Some very peculiar types undoubtedly existed among the Egyptians. I daresay they had their side-shows and circuses with the odd assortment of freaks that usually goes with such things. This poor fellow may have been a king's jester—it is really unfair to reproach him with his ugliness after all these years. I am sure his life was a very unhappy one."

The professor's scowl grew in volume. "You must be serious," he retorted. "This mummy is *very* unusual. I am not a sensationalist, my dear boy, but I may say that my enemies would give a great deal to use this thing to discredit me. We must be very wary about publishing the results of our experiments."

"Experiments?" I snatched at the word. I had a boyish and ridiculous eagerness for all varieties of research.

"I have some experiments in mind that will demand a great deal of courage. If you do not feel equal to them I shall want you to tell me so quite frankly. But first I must warn and prepare you, and describe what we have to deal with."

The professor lit an absurdly long panetela and puffed for several moments in silence. The smoke ascended spirally and formed a curious grayish nimbus above the mummy case. The mummy stood out in the depressing gloom like a sinister avenger of the eighty-three defenseless wretches that Professor Dewey had dissected and destroyed.

When my friend spoke again his voice had acquired a small measure of calm. He spoke slowly, punctuating his sentences with an occasional cough.

"There are few myths in the treasure-house of mankind that were not originally based upon solid objective facts. I do not believe that the imagination of primitive peoples is capable of creating bogies out of thin air. We are too easily deluded by modern science and altogether too apt to scoff at the legends of gods and goddesses that have come down to us. It is absurd to believe that the Egyptians created their monstrous bestial gods from mere observation of living animals. There is something so immense, so psychically terrible about the Egyptian gods that it is difficult to believe them simply the product of normal human imagination. They are either the imaginings of some

dreamer of wild and unheard-of powers, an Edgar Poe among the Egyptians, or——"

Professor Dewey paused without stating his alternative. I presume he wanted his heresy to sink in, for he waited several moments before continuing:

"These crocodile gods, these cat-headed and bat-eared divinities are really more debased than anything to be found anywhere in the modern world. Even your barbarous black fellow in Africa or Australia would be incapable of worshiping anything so vile. And yet if we are to believe historians the Egyptians had a high degree of ethical culture. They would not fashion such horrors willingly. I have often thought——"

Again my friend hesitated, as if ashamed to put his theory into words. My eagerness apparently reassured him.

"*I have often thought that these monsters really existed.* Why should we suppose that men are the only intelligent beings on this planet? There is so much evidence to the contrary, so very much evidence, that I feel justified in my theory. I do not think that I am a fool. My enemies" (I fear my friend suffered from a persecution complex) "would give years of their lives to overhear this conversation. But they shall only hear of the results—*if the results are not too revolting.*"

Professor Dewey sank down on a chair as if exhausted. Beads of sweat stood out horribly on his high yellow forehead. His lips quivered.

"George," he stammered. "We must put it to the test. We must sleep here tonight. Unless, of course, you fear to sleep in the room with *that.*"

"But what is *that,* really?" I asked, pointing with horror to the colossal mummy.

My friend did not answer me directly, but his words were dreadfully disturbing.

"Twenty or thirty thousand years ago the Egyptians buried their first kings. *There were strange kings in the dawn world.*"

2

Professor Dewey was sleeping soundly, but something made me sit up. I am not sure whether I dreamed a sound, or whether a sound had actually come from the corner of the room where the great mummy stood solemnly in its fifty wrappings. But whether the dismal noise had any basis in fact it was a profoundly disturbing thing to hear at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Perhaps you have listened to hounds baying at night across lonely moors, or perhaps you have heard in the tropics the horrid moans of small monkeys when they awake from their mindless sleep and see the stars watching them evilly. If you have heard such sounds you may have a remote idea of how vile these audibly sinister exhibitions of evil and fright seem to a normally constituted man.

The low whining that I heard (and it occasionally seemed to rise to an actual baying) did not frighten me. But had the chair that loomed unpleasantly before me out of the gloom suddenly entered into conversation with the sofa, or had the clock walked across the mantel, I should not have been more horrified.

I sat up and waited. For several moments nothing happened, but then I heard a low scratching and scraping as if something were trying to get out of the closet. Claws of some sort were indubitably at work somewhere.

"Rats!" I reflected, and I clung to the suggestion warmly. Of course there would be rats in a house given over to unhallowed and unsavory practises. "The professor is fortunate to have rats to do the really

dirty work," I mused. "They save him the bother of burning the odds and ends. It must be damnably difficult to get rid of fingernails and hair and such things, unless one burns them, and of course the rats would save him that task. The professor is really very fortunate. Dear, jolly rats!"

Then I realized the fatuousness of my reflections and passed my hand rapidly back and forth across my face. My forehead was infernally warm; I was excited, feverish. "It's probably a touch of influenza," I thought. "I should never have slept in this cold room." I recalled that I had been sneezing and coughing most of the previous afternoon. The slightest touch of fever makes me delirious—in that respect I am abnormally favored.

I pulled the blankets about my neck and turned over. I think then that I slept, but I am convinced that what I saw later had some external significance. The thing was more than a mere dream and certainly more than a hallucination. It was, I think, an actual *body of memories* projected across the room. When I saw it I was sitting up, and I heard the clock outside strike 4.

A white immensity spread before me, and for a moment its whiteness blinded me. It was like a series of projections on the silver screen. The white substance was continually changing, now thinning, now thickening, and horrid, distorted forms moved about in it. The forms were amorphous, and I could not at first distinguish them clearly. They were not altogether human. They seemed to have the bodies of men, but *the heads of animals.*

When the vision, or call it what you will, became clearer I saw that the unmentionable creatures had formed into a solid phalanx, and that they were marching solemnly before me. They carried between them some unspeakable object which they made no effort to conceal.

If the forms of the marchers were revolting, the form of the long, distorted *thing* that they carried was infernal. It was covered with hair, but I never had seen anything like it under the stars. It had a sunken bat-like face, and great, dog-shaped ears, and its yellow teeth glittered ominously in the strange, unnatural light. The thing was obviously lifeless, and its cheeks were sunken and hollow.

The watchers carried torches which they waved exultantly as if almost glad that the thing had died. I had a curious sympathy for these others, but heaven knows they were vile enough. The torches gave off a weird blue light and even, I thought, a mephitic smell; and as I watched, new ones were lit and the swaying, blasphemous procession moved forward more rapidly.

And then the chanting and intoning commenced, and the dreadful hymns for the dead swelled and revibrated in the room until I put my hands before my ears to shut out the ancient and obscene chants.

"Our master out of the skies is dead!" they wailed. "Deep, deep in the earth shall we bury our king. Long has he ruled us, and horrible the evil he did to us, but he was our king out of the skies, and we revere his memory. Horrible his black tongue that shot out fire, horrible the maidens he devoured, horrible the blood he drank, but he was a king. In the book of the dead it is written that he shall be judged by gods, by his peers he shall be judged. He shall appear as a snake, as a reptile before his peers, but by his ears they shall know him."

Then the picture cleared terribly, and I saw that the procession trod hot reddish sands, and a great stone effigy loomed up behind them. It was a sphinx, but a more ancient

sphinx than the one we know, and its eyes glowed banefully. And in a deep and perfectly round hole dug in the sand at the statue's base they buried their king, and strewed gold dust upon him, and anointed his limbs with oil which they poured from jars of veined porphyry.

Unmentionable were the rites they performed above him, and the last words of their loathsome high priest, *who had the head of a lizard,* were lethal words, and I shivered when I realized at whom they were directed.

"For thirty centuries you shall sleep, but a little shameless creature with no hair to cover him shall drag you forth, because in his time he shall be as a god. But his evil day will not be long under the sun. He too shall return unto dust, and a very thin creature with neither legs nor eyes shall play havoc with his bones. It is written. Rest in peace, and remember us who worshiped you!"

The vision grew vaguer, and the forms seemed to converge and merge into each other. Then gradually the darkness closed in, and I found myself staring with frightened eyes at Professor Dewey's monstrous acquisition. It loomed vaguely out of the blackness, and it seemed to be stirring, and squirming about.

I watched fascinated while the ancient wrappings fell away, and *two long pink hands* fumbled hectically with mildewed cerements. The hands were abnormally emaciated, and covered with thin, reddish hair.

I endeavored to rise, but the eyes of the thing watched me evilly, and ordered me to be silent. It seemed angry that I should question its spiritual supremacy. It had uncovered its eyes, but the great loathsome nose remained mercifully concealed by several layers of disintegrating wrappings. It was frightful to watch the thing's efforts to free itself. It wriggled and squirmed, and in its vileness it resembled a great fleshy worm endeavoring to escape from some deep sewer of earth.

What followed will always remain confused in my memory. I seem to recall Professor Dewey upon his back with closed eyes, and something standing above him in the dim light like an immemorial avenger. I seem to glimpse a supremely ghastly exterior—two great ears protruding from a narrow and greenish skull, and a great nose like an elephant's trunk showing briefly in profile.

Then fire—a deluge of colored fire, which shot out of the creature's nose and mouth, fire from hell, fire from beyond Arcturus. I saw the professor's eyes open, and I saw him stare at the thing for a moment in triumph. The exultation in his face was quickly replaced by agony and despair. He threw out his arms as if endeavoring to ward off an immediate doom, and while I watched, his face shriveled and blackened.

"I was right," he shrieked. "The Egyptians did not worship men. God pity my poor soul!"

I did not stay to comfort my stricken friend. I ran shrieking from the room, and out of the house into the street. I looked up to see thick black smoke pouring from an upper window, but I turned in no alarm. I ran wildly across deserted squares and through winding alleys and finally found my way to a leering subway entrance.

I fled insanely down the stairs, and climbed over the turnstile without depositing a fare. Luckily no one saw me. In a moment I was in a roaring train, my arms flung about a drunken beggar, and into his astonished ears I poured a tale that made him gasp and shake his head.

"You young 'uns allus get it somewhere," he grimaced. "I wish I had your luck."

I HAVE always found newspaper men exceedingly prosaic. The following cutting from a New York paper demonstrates my point:

A fire in the upper West Side caused a great deal of disturbance yesterday morning, when police reserves from three stations fought with firemen to keep excited passers-by from entering the burning building. For two hours thirty or forty hooded men endeavored to rescue the inmates, and caused a great deal of disturbance. The police were unable to explain why utter strangers should take such an interest in one poor perishing wretch, since it was later ascertained that the house was occupied by an eccentric professor and misanthrope who is suspected of bootlegging operations. Patrolman Henley, from the West 93rd Street Station, claims that one of the would-be rescuers removed his hood for a brief moment, and that his face was covered with fur, *and eaten away at the corners.* Luckily for Patrolman Henley's reputation he is known to suffer from migraine, and it is probable that what he imagined he saw had no basis in fact.

The wildly excited attempts of strangers to enter the building completely frustrated operations, and the unfortunate inmate perished. For a moment he was seen at the window, and those who were standing on the sidewalk immediately underneath declare that his hair and beard were actually on fire.

The upper portion of the building was completely destroyed. A number of curious bones were found in the room, including the skeleton of a gigantic dog. During the past week three previous fires have been reported in the neighborhood, and the police are investigating rumors of a firebug.

The Caves of Kooli-Kan

By ROBERT S. CARR

Where a grim and ghastly river wrapped in brooding menace flows
Through a barren blackened mountain that was never known to man,
In an awful land of silence where the sun all blood-red shows,
Lie those shrieking pits of horror called the Caves of Kooli-Kan.

Down the grim and ghastly river, clothed in lurid lights, come boats
Full of great black hairy Somethings with a hundred staring eyes,
Who converse on grisly subjects in their low and froglike notes,
Bathed in bloody beams of sunlight which come dripping from the skies.

Where the boats stop at a landing built of countless polished bones,
There the huge and hairy Somethings, full of mutterings, climb out,
To descend a gloomy stairway from whence issue tortured groans,
Mixed with peals of ghoulish laughter from that awful realm of doubt.

Some foul, sweaty, slimy substance from the walls exudes in beads,
For the barren, blackened mountain has, for ages steeped in sin,
Acted as the bridal chamber of the blackest, foulest deeds,
As the cradle of the creature called the Never-Should-Have-Been.

Huge, uncouth, misshapen Things whose screams of pain the senses numb,
Mighty, voiceless grim Unknowns with wings like bats the darkness fan;
All the wild-eyed stark mad terror for a million years to come
Haunts those shrieking pits of horror called the Caves of Kooli-Kan.

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

*No. 17. Ligeia**

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

I CAN not, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia. Long years since have elapsed, and my memory is feeble through much suffering. Or, perhaps, I can not now bring these points to mind, because in truth the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive that they have been unnoticed and unknown. Yet I believe that I met her first and most frequently in some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine. Of her family I have surely heard her speak. That it is of a remotely ancient date can not be doubted. Ligeia! Ligeia! Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world, it is by that sweet word alone—my Ligeia—that I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more. And now, while I write, a recollection flashes upon me that I have never known the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom. Was it a playful charge on the part of my Ligeia or was it a test of my strength of affection, that I should institute no inquiries upon this point? or was it rather a caprice of my own—a wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the most passionate devotion? I but indistinctly recall the fact itself—what wonder that I have utterly forgotten the circumstances which originated or attended it? And, indeed, if ever that spirit which is entitled *Romance*—if ever she, the wan and the misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt, presided, as they tell, over marriages ill-omened, then most surely she presided over mine.

There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the person of Ligeia. In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated. I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease, of her demeanor, or the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall. She came and departed as a shadow. I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study, save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder. In beauty of face no maiden ever equaled her. It was the radiance of an opium-dream—an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the fantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos. Yet her features were not of that regular mold which we have been falsely taught to worship in the classical labors of the heathen. "There is no exquisite beauty," says Bacon, Lord

*Poe himself considered this story his masterpiece.

Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and genera of beauty, "without some *strangeness* in the proportion." Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange." I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead: it was faultless—how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!—the skin rivaling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and repose, the gentle prominence of the regions above the temples; and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, "hyacinthine!" I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under—the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke—the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid, yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin: and here, too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek—the contour which the god Apollo revealed but in a dream of Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian. And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia.

For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals—in moments of intense excitement—that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty—in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps—the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth, the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What *was* it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers.

There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of mind, more thrillingly exciting than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find

ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression—felt it approaching, yet not quite be mine, and so at length entirely depart! And (strange, oh strangest mystery of all!) I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression. I mean to say that, subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always around, within me, by her large and luminous orbs. Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it. I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean; in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars in heaven (one especially, a star of the sixth magnitude, double and changeable, to be found near the large star in Lyra), in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. I have been filled with it by certain sounds from stringed instruments, and not unfrequently by passages from books. Among innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanvill, which (perhaps merely from its quaintness—who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment: "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

Length of years and subsequent reflection have enabled me to trace, indeed, some remote connection between this passage in the English moralist and a portion of the character of Ligeia. An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech, was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence. Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me—by the almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice—and by the fierce energy (rendered doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered.

I HAVE spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. Indeed upon any theme of the most admired, because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the academy, have I ever found Ligeia at fault? How singularly, how thrillingly, this one point in the nature of my wife has forced itself, at this late period only, upon my attention! I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a

childlike confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. With how vast a triumph, with how vivid a delight, with how much of all that is ethereal in hope, did I *feel,* as she bent over me in studies but little sought—but less known, that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!

How poignant, then, must have been the grief with which, after some years, I beheld my well-grounded expectations take wings to themselves and fly away! Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted. Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed. Wanting the radiant luster of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill. The wild eyes blazed with a too—too glorious effulgence; the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave; and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion. I saw that she must die—and I struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael. And the struggles of the passionate wife were, to my astonishment, even more energetic than my own. There had been much in her stern nature to impress me with the belief that, to her, death would have come without its terrors; but not so. Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. I groaned in anguish at the pitiable spectacle. I would have soothed—I would have reasoned; but, in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life—*but* for life—solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly. Yet not until the last instance, amid the most convulsive writhings of her fierce spirit, was shaken the external placidity of her demeanor. Her voice grew more gentle—grew more low—yet I would not wish to dwell upon the wild meaning of the quietly uttered words. My brain reeled as I harkened, entranced, to a melody more than mortal—to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known.

That she loved me I should not have doubted; and I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion. But in death only was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection. For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry. How had I deserved to be so blessed by such confessions? how had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of her making them? But upon this subject I can not bear to dilate. Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing, with so wildly earnest a desire, for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing, it is this eager vehemence of desire for life—*but* for life, that I have no power to portray, no utterance capable of expressing.

At high noon of the night in which she departed, beckoning me peremptorily to her side, she bade me repeat certain verses composed by herself not many days before. I obeyed her. They were these:

Lo! 't is a gala night
  Within the lonesome latter years.
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
  In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theater to see
  A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
  The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
  Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly;
  Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
  That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their condor wings
  Invisible Wo.

That motley drama—oh, be sure
  It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore,
  By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
  To the selfsame spot;
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
  And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout
  A crawling shape intrude:
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
  The scenic solitude!
It writhes—it writhes! with mortal pangs
  The mimes become its food,
And the seraphs sob at vermin fangs
  In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
  And over each quivering form
The curtain, a funeral pall,
  Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
  Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
  And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

"Oh God!" half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made an end of these lines—"O God! O Divine Father! shall these things be undeviatingly so? shall this conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who—who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigor? 'Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.'"

And now, as if exhausted with emotion, she suffered her white arms to fall, and returned solemnly to her bed of death. And as she breathed her last sighs, there came mingled with them a low murmur from her lips. I bent to them my ear, and distinguished, again, the concluding words of the passage in Glanvill: "*Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.*"

She died: and I, crushed into the very dust with sorrow, could no longer endure the lonely desolation of my dwelling in the dim and decaying city by the Rhine. I had no lack of what the world calls wealth. Ligeia had brought me far more, very far more, than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals. After a few months, therefore, of weary and aimless wandering, I purchased, and put in some repair, an abbey, which I shall not name, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England. The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building, the almost savage aspect of the domain, the many melancholy and time-honored memories connected with both, had much in unison with the feeling of utter abandonment which had driven me into that remote and unsocial region of the country. Yet although the external abbey, with its verdant decay hanging about it, suffered but little alteration, I gave way with a childlike perversity, and perchance with a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows, to a display of more than regal magnificence within. For such follies, even in childhood, I had imbibed a taste, and now they came back to me as if in the dotage of grief. Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold! I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of

opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. But these absurdities I must not pause to detail. Let me speak only of that one chamber ever accursed, whither, in a moment of mental alienation, I led from the altar as my bride—as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine.

There is an individual portion of the architecture and decoration of that bridal chamber which is not now visible before me. Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment *so* bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved? I have said that I minutely remember the details of the chamber—yet I am sadly forgetful of topics of deep moment; and here there was no system, no keeping, in the fantastic display, to take hold upon the memory. The room lay in a high turret of the castellated abbey, was pentagonal in shape, and of capacious size. Occupying the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window—an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice—a single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or moon, passing through it, fell with a ghastly luster on the objects within. Over the upper portion of the huge window extended the trellis-work of an aged vine, which clambered up the massy walls of the turret. The ceiling, of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device. From out of the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metal, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with serpent vitality, a continual succession of party-colored fires.

Some few ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure, were in various stations about; and there was the couch, too—the bridal couch—of an Indian model, and low, and sculptured of solid ebony, with a pall-like canopy above. In each of the angles of the chamber stood on end a gigantic sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor, with their aged lids full of immemorial sculpture. But in the draping of the apartment lay, alas! the chief fantasy of all. The lofty walls, gigantic in height, even unproportionably so, were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry—tapestry of a material which was found alike as a carpet on the floor, as a covering for the ottomans and the ebony bed, as a canopy for the bed, and as the gorgeous volutes of the curtains which partially shaded the window. The material was the richest cloth of gold. It was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view. By a contrivance now common, and indeed traceable to a very remote period of antiquity, they were made changeable in aspect. To one entering the room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and, step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk. The fantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial in-

troduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies, giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole.

In halls such as these, in a bridal chamber such as this, I passed, with the Lady of Tremaine, the unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage—passed them with but little disquietude. That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper—that she shunned me, and loved me but little—I could not help perceiving; but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise. I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I reveled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug), I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth.

About the commencement of the second month of the marriage, the Lady Rowena was attacked with sudden illness, from which her recovery was slow. The fever which consumed her, rendered her nights uneasy; and in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber of the turret, which I concluded had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the fantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself. She became at length convalescent—finally, well. Yet but a brief period elapsed, ere a second more violent disorder again threw her upon a bed of suffering; and from this attack her frame, at all times feeble, never altogether recovered. Her illnesses were, after this epoch, of alarming character, and of more alarming recurrence, defying alike the knowledge and the great exertions of her physicians. With the increase of the chronic disease, which had thus apparently taken too sure hold upon her constitution to be eradicated by human means, I could not fail to observe a similar increase in the nervous irritation of her temperament, and in her excitability by trivial causes of fear. She spoke again, and now more frequently and pertinaciously, of the sounds—of the slight sounds—and of the unusual motions among the tapestries, to which she had formerly alluded.

One night, near the closing in of September, she pressed this distressing subject with more than usual emphasis upon my attention. She had just awakened from an unquiet slumber, and I had been watching, with feelings half of anxiety, half of vague terror, the workings of her emaciated countenance. I sat by the side of her ebony bed, upon one of the ottomans of India. She partly arose, and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of sounds which she *then* heard, but which I could not hear—of motions which she *then* saw, but which I could not perceive. The wind was rushing hurriedly behind the tapestries, and I wished to show her (what, let me confess it, I could not *all* believe) that those almost inarticulate breathings, and those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall, were but the natural effects of that customary rushing of the wind. But a deadly pallor, overspreading her face, had proved to me that my exertions to reassure her would be

fruitless. She appeared to be fainting, and no attendants were within call. I remembered where was deposited a decanter of light wine which had been ordered by her physicians, and hastened across the chamber to procure it. But, as I stepped beneath the light of the censer, two circumstances of a startling nature attracted my attention. I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person; and I saw that there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich luster thrown from the censer, a shadow—a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect—such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade. But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium, and heeded these things but little, nor spoke of them to Rowena. Having found the wine, I recrossed the chamber, and poured out a gobletful, which I held to the lips of the fainting lady. She had now partially recovered, however, and took the vessel herself, while I sank upon an ottoman near me, with my eyes fastened upon her person. It was then that I became distinctly aware of a gentle footfall upon the carpet, and near the couch; and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby-colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the wine unhesitatingly, and I forbore to speak to her of a circumstance which must after all, I considered, have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour.

Yet I can not conceal it from my own perception that, immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife; so that, on the third subsequent night, the hands of her menials prepared her for the tomb, and on the fourth, I sat alone, with her shrouded body, in that fantastic chamber which had received her as my bride. Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted shadowlike before me. I gazed with unquiet eye upon the sarcophagi in the angles of the room, upon the varying figures of the drapery, and upon the writhing of the party-colored fires in the censer overhead. My eyes then fell, as I called to mind the circumstances of a former night, to the spot beneath the glare of the censer where I had seen the faint traces of the shadow. It was there, however, no longer; and breathing with greater freedom, I turned my glances to the pallid and rigid figure upon the bed. Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia—and then came back to my heart, with the turbulent violence of a flood, the whole of that unutterable wo with which I had regarded *her* thus enshrouded. The night waned; and still, with a bosom full of bitter thoughts of the one and only and supremely beloved, I remained gazing upon the body of Rowena.

It might have been midnight, or perhaps earlier, or later, for I had taken no note of time, when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my revery. I *felt* that it came from the bed of ebony—the bed of death. I listened in an agony of superstitious terror—but there was no repetition of the sound. I strained my vision to detect any motion in the corpse—but there was not the slightest perceptible. Yet I could not have been deceived. I *had* heard the noise, however faint, and my soul was awakened within me. I resolutely and perseveringly kept my attention riveted upon the body. Many minutes elapsed before any circumstances occurred tending to throw light upon

the mystery. At length it became evident that a slight, a very feeble and barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up within the cheeks, and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids. Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat. Yet a sense of duty finally operated to restore my self-possession. I could no longer doubt that we had been precipitate in our preparations—that Rowena still lived. It was necessary that some immediate exertion be made; yet the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants—there were none within call—I had no means of summoning them to my aid without leaving the room for many minutes—and this I could not venture to do. I therefore struggled alone in my endeavors to call back the spirit still hovering. In a short period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; the color disappeared from both eyelids and cheek, leaving a wanness even more than that of marble; the lips became doubly shriveled and pinched up in the ghastly expression of death; a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened. I fell back with a shudder upon the couch from which I had been so startlingly aroused, and again gave myself up to passionate waking visions of Ligeia.

An hour thus elapsed, when (could it be possible?) I was a second time aware of some vague sound issuing from the region of the bed. I listened—in extremity of horror. The sound came again—it was a sigh. Rushing to the corpse, I saw—distinctly saw—a tremor upon the lips. In a minute afterward they relaxed, disclosing a bright line of the pearly teeth. Amazement now struggled in my bosom with the profound awe which had hitherto reigned there alone. I felt that my vision grew dim, that my reason wandered; and it was only by a violent effort that I at length succeeded in nerving myself to the task which duty thus once more had pointed out. There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; a perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady *lived;* and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration. I chafed and bathed the temples and the hands, and used every exertion which experience, and no little medical reading, could suggest. But in vain. Suddenly, the color fled, the pulsation ceased, the lips resumed the expression of the dead, and, in an instant afterward, the whole body took upon itself the icy chilliness, the livid hue, the intense rigidity, the sunken outline, and all the loathsome peculiarities of that which has been, for many days, a tenant of the tomb.

And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia—and again (what marvel that I shudder while I write?) *again* there reached my ears a low sob from the region of the ebony bed. But why shall I minutely detail the unspeakable horrors of that night? Why shall I pause to relate how, time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification was repeated; how each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death; how each agony wore the aspect of a struggle with some invisible foe; and how each struggle was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse? Let me hurry to a conclusion.

THE greater part of the fearful night had worn away, and she who had been dead, once again stirred —and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter helplessness than any. I had long ceased to struggle or to move, and remained sitting rigidly upon the ottoman, a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions, of which extreme awe was perhaps the least terrible, the least consuming. The corpse, I repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced bodily and palpably into the middle of the apartment.

I trembled not—I stirred not—for a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor of the figure, rushing hurriedly through my brain, had paralyzed—had chilled me into stone. I stirred not—but gazed upon the apparition. There was a mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult unappeasable. Could it, indeed, be the *living* Rowena who confronted me? Could it indeed be Rowena *at all*—the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, *why* should I doubt it? The bandage lay heavily about the mouth—but then might it not be the mouth of the breathing Lady of Tremaine? And the cheeks—there were the roses as in her noon of life—yes, these might indeed be the fair cheeks of the living lady of Tremaine. And the chin, with its dimples, as in health, might it not be her?—but *had she then grown taller since her malady?* What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber, huge masses of long and disheveled hair; *it was blacker than the raven wings of midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the LADY LIGEIA."

IT WAS a dark and stormy night." How many authors there are who think that a weird story must plunge at once into a description of a storm! In six out of the first ten manuscripts opened by the editor this morning, the first lines harp upon the weather. Here are the openings, verbatim: 1. "A searing tongue of lightning quivered over the black heavens and the crash of thunder that followed reverberated with such violence that the earth trembled underfoot." 2. "The night was stormy, lightning was slashing through the dismal skies." 3. "It was a night of cold, tempestuous rage. From a velvet sky of Stygian dark the wild winds howled," etc. 4. "The rain was coming down in torrents. Headlights of machines as they flashed by, cast their weird lights upon a drenched world; it was truly a rotten night." 5. "The night was bleak and wintry. The wind moaned through the naked treetops like a lost spirit." 6. "It was night, dark and raining, and something had to be done."

Why is this? Must the heavens growl and weep to make a weird tale? Are the stories in this issue any the less weird because not one of them begins with a weather report? The weather is a useful topic, when one has nothing else to talk about; but unless it is vitally important to the story, a discussion of the weather is as banal in a weird tale as it is in ordinary conversation. Yet an amazingly large proportion of the manuscripts received in the editor's mail discuss the weather in the very first line. The winds howl in fury, and shriek like lost demons; the thunder crashes; the rain pours down in torrents, and the trees toss their tortured limbs—indeed one might think the stories had all been written by the same hand, for they sound so much alike. Such openings are as familiar in the editorial rooms of WEIRD TALES as the trite "Men think that I am mad, but wait, let me tell my story and judge for yourself"—a type of story opening that has been used by amateurs a thousand times since Poe set the style in *The Tell-tale Heart*.

The September issue of WEIRD TALES seems to have made a distinct hit with you, the readers. The comment has been almost uniformly enthusiastic.

Writes Michael H. Sweetman of Calhan, Colorado: "I have read WEIRD TALES for two years, and think the September is the best issue yet. It is by far the most interesting magazine published today. *Jumbee* has my vote for the best story in the September issue. It is so real that I can not think it a work of imagination. Was it an actual experience? *Across Space* promises to be a wonderful story."

"Three cheers for the September WEIRD TALES," writes Ross L. Bralley, of Independence, Kansas. "It is full of thrills from page to page. *Across*

Space is a dandy, and it is not beyond the possibility of such things happening. *The Bird of Space* is another whiz. I am enthusiastic in my approval of your stories of planets and cosmic space, and hope you will give us more of them. There is one thing I as a reader would add, namely: heretofore the supposed inhabitants of other worlds have been described as more or less human, but I would like to have someone create a new theme in which these inhabitants are anything but human, giving them as much unearthliness as possible. The human resemblance makes them seem too much of this earth."

Joe D. Thomas, of St. Louis, votes against *The Bird of Space* on the grounds that it is really a continued story masquerading as a complete short story: "If this isn't a serial," he writes, "then I'm a green-eyed monkey." Miss Beatrice Cookney, of Oakland, California, comments as follows on the same story: "*The Bird of Space*, I think, is the best story you have ever printed. I am waiting anxiously for the sequel. I only hope we can have more like it by the same author."

Harry E. Balch, of Blaine, Washington, protests against Greye La Spina's serial story, *Fettered*, because it is "based on ridiculous superstitions; the story might have been good, but such trash as a cat jumping over a dead man is too rank to be considered as a good weird story. Seabury Quinn's stories are always the best in the book, and no matter what any weak-nerved readers may say, his *House of Horror* was very good. Some of the readers complained that the story was 'ugly and horrible.' When I finished that story all I could do was marvel at the power of Seabury Quinn's pen—that story was not too horrible, it was just right—just the kind of story the real lover of weird tales likes. For a final word, I wish WEIRD TALES would not publish any more stories that put forth superstition as truth, as does *Fettered*."

Greye La Spina's serial, however, seems to have won a firm hold on the affections of the readers, for the comment has been almost entirely favorable —and most of it enthusiastic in commendation of the story.

Writes Albert Elmo Morgareidge, of St. Louis: "There is only one drawback to your magazine, you do not publish enough stories, and we have to wait so long for the next issue. But as long as you have some of Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin stories, we can stand a long wait, for they are worth the purchase price of the magazine, alone. But as a printer by trade, and a newspaper man, I will add that *The Night Wire* was the best story in the September issue."

The showing made by *The Night Wire*, by H. F. Arnold, in the voting was one of the agreeable surprizes in the balloting for favorite story in the September issue. This story was only a four-page "filler" story, buried in the magazine without even an illustration, yet it drew so many votes that it ranks right behind the three leaders in popularity with the readers. *The Night Wire* is the type of utterly "different" story that we are always looking for, the type that causes the editor to chortle with glee when he gets one in the day's mail. And such utterly bizarre and "different" stories are as nectar and ambrosia to the reader who is sated with the humdrum magazine fare of today.

Writes E. Hoffmann Price, author of *The Peacock's Shadow* in this issue: "Your September number presents some interesting types which move me to comment. Two interplanetary stories in succession should keep the Schlossel fans from gnashing their teeth! The Easter Island atmosphere of the serial is distinctly novel. I have often wondered, as has most of the world, at the

outlandish faces of those mysterious statues; so be sure I shall anticipate the author's further revelations. His work in spots appealed to me as quite colorful. The pleasing personality of de Grandin is welcome as ever. Seabury Quinn does well to continue with the likable Frenchman. Plot and technique may at times skate on thin ice, but trust to the doctor to slide it across with his usual élan. And then come two who defy analysis: Lovecraft, and the Rev. Mr. Whitehead. Irrespective of subject, of plot or lack of plot, their respective styles alone distinguish them. The former draws heavy and merited applause from your readers; but it seems to me, judging from The Eyrie, that the latter's suave, graceful simplicity and elegance of style is not receiving its just portion of general recognition."

Margaret Harper, of Claymont, Delaware, writes to The Eyrie: "WEIRD TALES is certainly the most entertaining magazine I have ever chanced upon, and I don't believe it could be improved upon. I saw it for the first time on a news stand last April, and don't intend to miss an issue as long as it is published, which I hope will be a long time. I select *Ancient Fires* by Seabury Quinn as the best story in the September issue, and second to that is *The Bird of Space;* that is truly a weird and wonderful story, and I wouldn't miss the sequel for anything. Greye La Spina's serial is developing thrillingly, with fresh horrors and surprizes. That new serial, *Across Space,* is great! Those awful weird creatures in that volcano! All the stories in the September issue are deserving of special mention."

Kenneth Overton, of Port Arthur, Texas, writes to The Eyrie: "I have been an ardent reader of WEIRD TALES since the first edition, and I can truthfully say that they are the best stories I have ever read—and I read a good deal."

What is your favorite story in this issue? Your three favorites in the September number were *The Bird of Space,* by Everil Worrell; part one of *Across Space,* by Edmond Hamilton, and *Ancient Fires,* Seabury Quinn's story of reincarnation.

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The Peacock's Shadow

(Continued from page 596)

and the two; by intuition. Very simple, *n'est-ce pas?*

"And this Santiago," continued the old man, "wore on the pommel of his sword a peacock; as also did Monsieur the Marquis on that sword at his château. None of which really proved anything; however, I began to think. Thus it was but a matter of having you watched, Mademoiselle, until things happened.

"And while you watched, *mon vieux,* I prowled around, and found the plans of Vauban's fortifications and engineering works, and saw that he had not built the passage leading to St. Leon. And as for last night, I attended the preliminary rites, having, as you so nicely put it, beaned one of the worshipers and assumed his costume."

"What the devil! You joined in their ceremonies?"

"Yes. It was I who spoke to you; but you did not take the tumble, so you missed some rare sport. I had but to put myself into the case which had contained the embalmed body of my ancient enemy, Santiago. And thus they carried me into position at the altar. Then, at the crucial moment, I kicked off the cover, and fired a press photographer's flashlight gun. Dazzled by that fearful light, they could see nothing. As for me, I closed my eyes as I fired, and then, after the flash. . ."

He affectionately caressed the blackjack.

"And with this wonderful little implement, I worked them over, as you might say it, while they still blinked and rubbed their eyes, utterly blinded by that sudden flare."

"He really was going to kill me?" queried the queen of Lachepaillet,

(Continued on page 720)

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(Continued from page 718)

who had scarcely grasped the entire sequence of events, and their significance.

"Exactly that, *chère petite.* In his way, he loved you, for yourself, and for the sake of his departed sweetheart; and therefore he was to sacrifice you, and embalm you, and set you up in state, in the mummy case of a princess, thus performing the supreme penance, making his peace with the Lord Peacock, and with Santiago alike. An artistic soul, Monsieur the Marquis! He is leaving for Spain. . unless unhappily I struck him too hard! But he will not annoy you again."

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"That is really not so incredible. For you, Mademoiselle, are the niece of her whom Monsieur the Marquis loved twenty years ago; so that that resemblance is not at all a subject of wonder, even if extraordinary. This, however, he did not know, nor I either, until I investigated! nor did you know. As for the mummy, well, coincidence. . . and a stretch of fancy."

"But your duel. Pierre, at St. Leon?"

"Who knows? Illusion. . . a stranger from Kurdistan. . . I attempt no explanation. Santiago is dead, even as may be the marquis and some of his followers; but the Stranger still lives, and the Peacock's shadow still hangs over us."

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